



HUYE *hombre* HUYE

*Diary of a maximum
security prisoner*



xosé tarrío gonzález

Huye,
Hombre,
Huye

Huye Hombre Huye

This work is licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution-
Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License.
<https://creativecommons.org>

LBC Books, 2014

Dedication

“Perhaps inside ourselves there is a wild beast, surely out of the suffering comes something we want more.”

To my mother...

To Isabel Alvarez Gonzalez ... (Isa)

To Gabriel Pombo Da Silva ... (Musta)

To Eduardo Jean-Baptiste Alvarez ... (Chico)

To Alexandra de Querios Vaz Pinheiro ... (Xandra)

To Friendship

To Hope

To Freedom

To all those men and women freed
from the world of prison

Translator's Note

This has been a fairly epic project that started many years ago in a Barcelona bookshop with my friend excitedly pushing a Spanish copy of this book into my hands and telling me I had to read it despite my limited grasp of the language. Two years later I found myself alone in the woods and started reading and making notes to help me translate it. I quickly realised how simple and powerful it is and that others should have the opportunity to read it in English. Thanks to LBC and other companions, that is possible and I feel happy to put the finishing touches on what has felt like a life-changing project to be a part of. I can only hope I have done it justice.

The word “gypsy” is used in the text as a translation of the word *gitano*. I wish to apologise unreservedly for any offence caused by this, and recognise that it is frequently used as a racial slur. However I don't feel like I have the right to change Xosé's words to suit my own perspective and position, nor am I clear on the usage of the word in Spain. Most likely the people referred to as such call themselves Kale or Romani.

Muchas gracias to Mirzo—without the introduction, none of this would have happened—and to Pastora who continues her son's struggle.

Special thanks to Eric TwoHeadedDog for the artwork and Fancy L for the cover design.

There have been too many people who have helped me along the way with proof reading and encouragement to mention by name, but you are all remembered and thanked.

Dedicated to Dee and to all those who struggle to keep their heads above water in this prison world, and to Colin Riot McQuilan who showed us all what unity meant.

This is a working class protest. Nothing more and nothing less.

Seán Breathnach // Lugnut // xPSDx
Occupied Sinixt Territory, 2014

Contents

<i>Preliminary note (adapted from the Argentine edition)</i>	ii
<i>Prologue by Iñaki Rivera Beiras</i>	iii
<i>Prologue by Gabriel Pombo Da Silva</i>	xii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
 Part One:	
The Way of Corruption	1
 Part Two:	
The Way of Freedom	53
 Part Three:	
The Way of Rebellion	87
 Part Four:	
The Way of Repression	196
 <i>Epilogue</i>	290
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	294
<i>For Xosé in Memoriam</i>	295
<i>by Gabriel Pombo Da Silva</i>	

Xosé Tarrío González was born in 1968 in La Coruña, into a working class family. At the age of eleven he was sent to a reformatory for children from troubled families, from which he escaped twice. Aged fourteen, he began a spree of petty thievery which led him dozens of times into the Coruñan reformatory of Palavea, from which he escaped a dozen times, and he was eventually sentenced by special judicial order to the Special Reformatory for Treatment and Rehabilitation, where he had to remain until the age of sixteen. Following a routine of robberies and prison—his family meanwhile moved to Switzerland for economic reasons—he entered the underworld of drugs at the age of seventeen. At nineteen, he returned to prison to serve a two-and-a-half year sentence. It was during this sentence that unfolded the circumstances he relates in the book, resulting in a sentence of a further seventy-one years without parole, and recommendations for over one hundred years.

Preliminary words

Translating *Huye, hombre, huye* is another contribution to the struggle against prisons. The clarity with which it narrates the daily torture of being a prisoner—in this case, in the prisons of the Spanish State—and, both here and there, what isolation does to you, as well as the depth and lucidity of some of Tarrío's thoughts: these are some of the reasons why we think it is worthwhile to translate the story of the life, struggles, and experiences told in the following pages. As for the rest, the book speaks for itself.

In this moment characterized by indifference and dissipation of energies, by an inability to coordinate different moments, the struggle against prison, against the system that imposes it and the society that reproduces it, like every other struggle in which we are immersed, does not need sympathizers, followers, or spectators. It needs companions with whom to fight side by side.

(Adapted from the 2008 Argentine edition.)

Prologue

Normally, writing the prologue to a book involves commenting on it and introducing readers to two things: the book's content, and the author. In this case, however, the second thing presents a specific problem. Indeed, I cannot present the author of this work here, directly and personally, since for many years he has been in prison, in a situation of isolation and separation from the outside world that has taken on exceptional traits—as we will see.

By all this I mean to underline that, as I write this prologue, I do it based on a careful reading of the book's manuscript and from knowledge about his life story from several of his companions; but I have not been able to meet Xosé Tarrío González. What's more, I have tried to communicate with him through the mail, also sending packages of books to him at his prison (specifically Soto del Real, in June 1997), but none of it has worked. He has received nothing, and my packages have been returned. The Penitentiary Administration, after countless phone calls and contacts with the Director himself, alleges that “packages are not permitted” (although they are, expressly in Article 50 of the Penal Code). Despite all this, the activity of some prisoner support groups and the solidarity of certain individuals have made it so that he knows what I am writing and, in some way, we communicate over the prison walls and barriers (sometimes you have to weave many nets that allow you to bring information, messages, care, AIR!..., into an asphyxiating institution like prison).

The story that makes up the core of this book is the autobiographical narrative of a prisoner in the Spanish carceral archipelago, one who has suffered the pernicious effects of a penal system troubled by an insurmountable legitimization crisis. Xosé Tarrío González, dweller of the prison shadows, throws a light on his world so as to teach the “free” world about the practices that institutional segregation has brought about in the closed world of prisoner isolation.

If its readers are capable of abstracting themselves from the time and country where this book was written, they are likely to think that the events narrated in it could only take place in a dictatorial, authoritarian system, not at all respectful of the rules of the game that one would expect in a “Social and democratic State governed by the rule of law” (First Article of the Spanish Constitution). Indeed, these practices—mistreatments and tortures, the reduction of everyday life to minimal spaces of total cellular isolation during so many hours for so many years, the ongoing transfers from prison to prison across the entire geography of legal suffering, the interference with correspondence, the abuses of authority (all of which the author describes repeatedly)—hark back to other times (or other scenarios) that any normal person, unaware of what prison really means, would suppose to have been overcome long ago, and, in any case, would think completely inappropriate for a democratic system bounded by the rule of law.

But that’s not how it is. These practices, which from any perspective violate the most basic rights of any person, have to be located in the present time, in Spain, and in precisely that democratic State-form. How is it possible, the imaginary reader will ask, that such practices take place today, and in a political system that claims to respect human rights? This question is perhaps the first step to a thinking process that is increasingly critical. We can no longer go on silencing the penitentiary universe; we must shine a light on it, denounce its brutality, bring it before the public, and contribute to the disappearance of the feeling of “distance” and “foreignness” with which the prison is always perceived. In all those senses, the work that Xosé Tarrío González has shared with us can contribute decisively.

Let me return to the question from that imaginary average reader. It is useful to stop for a moment and think critically about the prison practices under discussion. Why so harsh? Why so many years of isolation? Since when do prisons use such techniques? Such questions necessarily bring us back to the history of the segregating

institution so as to grasp that, actually, not much has changed. In the historical shift between the end of the old monarchical regimes and the coming of Modernity, that is to say, when being deprived of freedom became the principal penal sanction, we can already find the characteristic traits of the incipient penal system: restricted diet, extremely severe discipline, the cult of work, and isolation day and night. How was such a system built, one that, substituted for bodily torture and public executions, was described as “humane”? A historical overview shows, among other things, that certain current institutions and practices are neither new nor modern, but were adopted at precise times and places. Refreshing our memory is the first step to developing a critical culture. Let’s try this exercise before reading the book before us, as maybe the reader will find a guiding thread in certain practices of institutional pain.

We know that, from the second half of the sixteenth century on, an entire network of “work-houses” began to flourish in Europe (having been inaugurated in England), becoming widely distributed all the way up to the first decades of the eighteenth century, as Spitzer and Scull showed some time ago. Though we can already see some punitive practices in the ancient world (as a response to transgressive behaviour, slaves could be locked up), it is also true that the “great confinement” was a phenomenon not found until the end of the Middle Ages and the slow appearance of capitalism.

It was at that time that the first practices of mass segregation of individuals appeared in Europe, manifesting in various institutions: asylums, hospices, houses of correction, infirmaries, prisons... There is a large literature on these new practices. Foucault, for example, points to the “practices of social prophylaxis” of the late Middle Ages, aimed at fighting against the threat of the contagion of leprosy, as the origin of the construction of the great infirmaries. Spitzer and Scull discuss the British “work-houses”. Rusche and Kirchheimer, as well as Melosso and Pavarini, point to the appearance of the first French “*hôpital général*”, the Dutch “*rasp-huis*” and “*spin-huis*”,

and Italian “*casas di lavoro*”. A separate literature addresses the decisive role of religious experience in the production of a culture of “domestication” of human beings, rendering them more useful in the exploitation of labor, and the affinities of discipline in the monasteries with the still distant one of the factory.

The “custodial option” became increasingly concrete in the politics of social discipline. As Pavarini remarks, this was the birth of the idea that the most adequate response to the problems arising from sicknesses, disturbances, and dangers was to sequester their protagonists in restricted spaces, separate from the rest of society. The “great confinement,” “institutional segregation,” began in this way.

Without a doubt, these practices of segregation were not perfected until the “panoptic” innovation. The idea of a closed space designed to make possible the surveillance of those inside it (Bentham’s “principle of inspection”) could be used to build hospitals, factories, orphanages, prisons... The principle of isolation (“solitary confinement”) thus came to be the bedrock of a new form for the management of legal suffering. However, “panopticism” was also something more than the simple aspiration for the inner control of the institution. As Pietro Costa points out, in Bentham’s political-juridical metaphor of the Panopticon, what is being designated is an “external place”, “separate from the juridical project”; a place where a Power not bound by the formal limits of the Social Contract (which was beginning to be imposed throughout civil society) could be experimented with. What was being designed was the idea of setting up a space for “segregating from the labour market” whoever was not disciplined according to the new rules of the game. A new pedagogy of human subordination could now begin to be practiced in these new spaces, “external” to the hegemonic juridical project. That is the true meaning of what is known as “panopticism”.

Why did the new segregationist ideology triumph in the field of social control, bringing about the rapid abandonment of other punitive practices? There are two responses that have come close

to answering this provocative question. One is Foucault's. For him "the prison-form" pre-exists its systematic use in penal law. It was constituted on the outside of the judicial apparatus, when, throughout the social body, procedures were elaborated for spatially fixing and distributing individuals, classifying them, obtaining from them a maximization of time and effort, training their bodies, continuously codifying their behaviour, keeping them in a gapless visibility, forming around them an entire machine of observation and record-keeping, constituting a knowledge about them that is accumulated and centralized. "The general form of an apparatus intended to render individuals docile and useful, by means of precise work upon their bodies, indicated the prison institution, before the law ever defined it as the penalty par excellence. At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was, it is true, a penalty of detention; and it was a new thing. But it was really the opening up of penalty to mechanisms of coercion already elaborated elsewhere" (*Discipline and Punish*, 231).

The other approach to the study of institutional segregation comes from authors such as Rusche and Kirchheimer (of the Frankfurt School), first, and then their continuation by Melossi and Pavarini. In this line of study, a clear connection was established between the emergence of the capitalist mode of production and the origin of the modern prison institution. What the scholars mentioned underline is that in a pre-capitalist system of production, prison—as a punishment—does not exist. "This claim is historically verifiable, with the caveat that we do not mean that prison was unknown in the feudal system, but rather that *the punishment* of internment as deprivation of freedom was (...) In fact, as far as the nature of the equivalence, 'for the idea to appear that it was possible to atone for the crime with an abstractly predetermined quantum of freedom, it was necessary that all forms of wealth be reduced to the simpler and more abstract form of human labor measured by time'. The capitalist mode of production and the institution of

prison (and other ‘subaltern institutions’) emerged at the same time in a determinate relation.”

Profound modifications in the forms of capital accumulation, proliferation of attacks against private property (together with its normative recognition), a new importance for the value “time” (as the unit of exchange that the worker “sells” in the new labour market), reabsorption of the idle in periods of unemployment... these are reasons that explain not only the birth of the prison but also its rapid diffusion in the Western world of the nineteenth century.

Now that the “punitive prison” was invented, it began to spread. Though it was born in the framework of the Enlightenment (Foucault reminds us that “The ‘Enlightenment’, which discovered the liberties, also invented the Disciplines”), it comes of age with Positivism. In fact, Positivism was from the start a great influence on what was called “criminology”. The new current of thought was immediately focused on the analysis of the personalities of those who violated penal law, seeking a “scientific” explanation of criminality. The basic presupposition from which it began was the singular and distinct character of delinquent personalities as opposed to the behavior of those adapted to social and juridical norms. And, as Bergalli notes, implicit in this singular origin of delinquent behavior is a pathological basis in the individual that carries it out. This “scientific” concern about the phenomenon of criminal deviance, the analysis of “why” certain subjects commit crimes, centered the entire attention of Positivism on the search for the causes of this criminality. In this way, Lombroso centered his analysis on a rigid “biological determinism” as the main cause of criminal behavior, although he did not ignore psychological or social factors. Garofalo’s contribution was to expand Lombroso’s vision in its psychological dimensions, and Ferri’s in the sociological ones. The causes of criminal behavior were thus supposedly determined: biological, psychological, and sociological.

Given the preceding, it is understandable that Positivism found

prisons to be the perfect laboratories to test out its hypotheses. So, well into the nineteenth century, a new penitentiary system was put into place: a “progressive” one, consisting of a possibility for the imprisoned to improve their penitentiary situation, and even gain their (conditional) freedom ahead of time, if their behavior was judged favorably by the penitentiary authorities. Therefore order, control, and surveillance over the prisoners had to be obtained, and for that, there were three fundamental resources. One has already been mentioned: architecture put its knowledge in the service of the surveillance of the imprisoned population (recall the central tower of the Panopticon). The second instrument intended to control prisoners comes from the science of law: when the rebellious act has been detected (or the idleness of the prisoner towards work is noticed) the disciplinary mechanisms of the institutions begin to work to “corral” the rebel or “stimulate” the lazy one. The third instrument of this surveillance is the possibility that prisoners will improve their situation, or shorten their sentences, through an evaluation of their behavior inside the institution. Psychological behaviorism, with all its pernicious experiments, will thus penetrate the management of prisons.

Spain, too, has been receptive to the carceral ideology that has been sketched out here. In a summary way, one could say that, during the Second Republic (which produced notable positive reforms), as during Franco’s dictatorship (with its institutionalized kidnapping), and also during the so-called “political transition to democracy” (in which we saw a democratic penitentiary reform that ignored the demands of political prisoners), the “progressive” penal system remained the same, with minor variations. Despite the great differences that could be pointed out at every level of social, political, and cultural life in the periods I have just mentioned, at no time was the smooth functioning of the disciplinary government of prison substantially altered. As is known, Article 25.2 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution established the goal of re-socialization for imprisonment, and also that prisoners would enjoy the principal fundamental rights

discussed in the constitution. However, the subsequent legislative and regulatory development of the constitutional mandates, and the practices of the Prison Administration, have slowly delegitimated the bases on which a new penitentiary system of the “social and democratic state of the rule of law” would rest.

As far as what interests us most here, it is important to keep in mind that it was the Organic General Penitentiary Law (numbered 1—it was the first law in the development of the Constitution), which allows for a so-called “first grade” classification—this is the closed regime that brings us back to the centuries-old first penitentiary systems. Its author, Carlos García Valdés, justified it as a “bitter necessity”. Some years later, this regime of isolation in cells became more sophisticated due to some memorandum from the Central Penitentiary Administration. The articulation of the first File System for Special Attention Prisoners [*Fichero de Internos de Especial Seguimiento*] (the sadly famous FIES that Xosé Tarrío González discusses throughout his book) meant that Spain had definitively entered into what in other countries has been called “emergency culture” or “exception” in the realm of prison policy. The FIES regime, so often denounced by lawyers, prisoner support collectives, and families, etc., supposes the application of a precise and brutal carceral technique that reduces those included in the File System to an extremely lengthy isolation, as well as the practical constriction of their conditions of life.

It is not my role here to describe the details of this degrading practice. The author of this book does it better than anyone could, having suffered its effects for so many years now. I merely want to point out this newest (up to now, at least) link in the historical chain, the one connecting today’s prisons with the history I discussed above. It is easy to discern that there are many resemblances to the first penitentiary systems in the basic idea of isolation. In light of this, the inevitable question arises: what happened to the re-socializing paradigm that the Constitution attributes to punishing by imprisonment? In other

words: how can a penitentiary system be legitimated when it assaults the most basic rights of those caught within it? It is best not to answer these questions until after reading this book.

To conclude, I would merely like to warn potential readers not to fall into the temptation to read this book like an adventure story. It is the life of a man who survives in subhuman conditions not far from us and who, in these circumstances, has been able to compose an honest and stark testimony about the reality of imprisonment today. It seems equally important to note that, in Spain, there have for years been many prisoners under the FIES regime. Some are dead (suicide, or the devastating effects of AIDS, in these conditions, have destroyed them); others scrape by as they can in circumstances similar to the author of this book. And, although it may be unpleasant to end on a hopeless note, I do not foresee a more human horizon, or a more respectful criminal or prison policy, simply because prison is the ultimate container for a quite specific political-economic project. In the context of a State that is abandoning many of its former tasks, of the privatization of important public services, the precarization of the labor market, and economic globalization, etc., I don't think that there are many spaces left where we could discuss overcoming or even restricting the use of incarceration. This does not mean paralysis or doing nothing, but the other way around: from the highest skepticism a "culture of resistance" can begin, one that keeps critical thinking alive.

That is why Xosé Tarrío González's struggle for survival and the denunciations he makes in this book can become a wake-up call to provoke in all of us the need to mobilize against this state of affairs. As Pavarini writes, probably few of us today could stand to witness the ancient rite of the torture of the condemned; but, also today, it would seem that people's sensitivity stops at the threshold of the prison, just as, not too long ago, the conscience of civilized Europe stopped at the signs reading *Arbeit macht frei* before the Nazi concentration camps. Only to the extent that we understand that we

are all quite close to prison, that it is not distant from us, and that we all produce the prison and the prisoners we have, will we be able to act so as to change a reality that produces true shame and fear.

Iñaki Rivera Beiras
Professor of Criminology
University of Barcelona

Prologue by Gabriel Pombo Da Silva

To the slave, revolution is an imperative, a love-inspired, conscious act of desperation. It's aggressive. It isn't cool or cautious. It's bold, audacious, violent, an expression of icy, disdainful hatred! It can hardly be any other way without raising a fundamental contradiction. If revolution is anything less than an effective defense/attack weapon and a charger for the people to mount now, it is meaningless to the great majority of the slaves. If revolution is tied to dependence on the inscrutabilities of long-range politics, it cannot be made relevant to the person who expects to die tomorrow.

George Jackson

These words/thoughts from George Jackson are my way of introducing the prologue of my friend Xosé Tarrío that is soon to be published in Argentina...

George Jackson was killed in San Quentin Prison on 21 August, 1971, in an escape attempt. He was a great prisoner organizer and an important figure of the black revolution in the US.

For many of us, in prison as well as all over the Iberian Peninsula, Xosé was also an important figure. Though his death was not as heroic as Jackson's, he was also murdered... setting aside geographical and ideological differences, one thing is always the same: power has no pity or compassion for those who dare to question it, denounce it,

much less for those who attack it frontally without hesitation...

In Argentina or Chile you have had numerous examples of what I am talking about here, and I don't think I need to recall here the disappeared and their torturers, where the bones of each lie...

The fact is that there is not a single Nation-State ("First World" or "Third World" though it may be) that, once the "moment of truth" has arrived, doesn't pull out every means at its disposal to fight the people who revolt (and it is absurd here to speak of legality or illegality since these have always been means/forms of bourgeois domination and control)...

The FIES isolation regime is another of these means/resources that Power pulled from its bag of tricks to crush a handful of rebels and isolate them from the rest of the prisoners, who might have followed the dignified example of these few...

And, as is the custom in every struggle/rebellion/liberatory process, we have our heroes and villains, we have our failures and successes; things that are worth remembering, and others better forgotten; of course, versions for every taste and preference...

For me the entire history of FIES is the straightforward demonstration of how all Power reacts when it is challenged, its (presumed) authority questioned...

On the street (where there is what is called freedom) authorities and powers more or less hide the means (though not always and not everywhere) when it is time to suffocate the struggles of the oppressed. But in prison there is no need to cosmetically disguise repression, since who is really interested in prisoners being treated like and considered as people? I guess their relatives, friends, and companions...

I won't be the one to call for "more humane prisons", as they are named by those who think that, by locking people up and murdering them bit by bit they can resocialize somebody... It is the natural and inalienable right of all human beings to be free and live in freedom; therefore it is logical and natural that whoever suffers

the loss of their freedom and the fear for their life (including its dignity) fight by all means available to take it back...

And even when our goal as anarchists is the abolition of all prisons, let's not stop supporting anyone who in one way or another fights against these exclusion and extermination centres (as distant as some might be from our ideals). Just as, in the street, we fight against unwaged labour (for example) and all forms of management and exploitation, we do not any less support struggles that others call "partial" or "economic" (as in, over Rights), because if we only take on support for pure struggles/individuals we will find that we never feel the moral obligation to fight with/support those who are not as pure and radical...

So let these words be energizing for the prisoners of Haedo and Avellaneda, and all those who I haven't heard speak but are no doubt out there resisting the blow to the pride and dignity that all anarchist have in common: the State (which is but a form of political organization), Capital (a way of understanding economic sciences) and all their serfs and lackeys...

All my love and resistance to those who love freedom.

Aachen Extermination Center
Germany, October '07

Introduction

Your wild dogs want liberty; they bark for joy in their cellar when your spirit endeavours to open all prison doors.

F. Nietzsche

La Coruña, August 27, 1987

It's four o'clock on a sunny summer afternoon in the Coruñan neighbourhood of Katanga. The nice weather suggests a stroll and a breath of peaceful air. Maybe that is why no one notices the presence of the police. Disguised in plain clothes and led by Peña, an inspector from the Gang Squad, a group of officers take up positions around the house of a man they have come to arrest. Specialists in armed kidnappings, they won't allow their prey any opportunity for escape. The manhunt has begun.

It's five o'clock when movement is spotted inside the house. The door opens and from inside comes a young man, hurrying towards one of the local bars. He suspects nothing, so he walks confidently and unwarily.

Its target identified, the police apparatus is set in motion. A pair of lovers walks towards him, and when they reach him, she, in a rapid movement, draws her gun on him, while her partner cuffs his hands behind his back. It goes smoothly. Other officers leave their hiding places to assist in the arrest. The look in their eyes is the satisfaction of a job well done. Several cars arrive at the scene, and the victim is put inside one of them, and disappears en route to police headquarters.

The neighbours have observed, with serious looks on their faces, as the guardians of law and order did their job. A heavy silence now reigns over the neighbourhood.

This is not the first time they have witnessed an arrest, and they thank God that this time they haven't taken one of their own children. Here the majority of the youth are delinquents or addicts, or in the worst cases, both. That is why no one applauds the actions

of the police. At least not here.

A man has just been erased from the social map, and from here, without a doubt, he will go rest his bones in some filthy, infested cell in the prison sewers. There, a debt to society for a small robbery committed years before awaits him. For him the rotten path begins: a path leading to the hell of the civilized. He is sentenced to two years, four months and a day in prison by the provincial court in La Coruña, still unaware of the extent of his bad luck.

It would be the beginning of a revenge taken by those whose mouths are full of words like democracy and justice, but who will never accept the autonomy of individuals who refuse to follow their rules. They preach about detention and restriction of freedom, but not without first easing their consciences with the legalities of the whole process.

At age nineteen, José Tarrío González, known by his nickname *Che*, faced his hardest sentence. Disinherited by the world for being born into a poor family, he travelled the inevitable road that led from the boarding school to the reformatory and from there to prison. He knows, better than anyone, that when he started off on the journey of life, he didn't set off with the same luggage as the children of wealthier families, and didn't have the same opportunities as them. Parts of his childhood and adolescence were spent in state institutions where he was educated. Too often he was brutally beaten by those who, put in charge of him, granted themselves the right to punish. He knows that the system is unjust and serves the interests of a few at the expense of the rest, who have been turned into cogs in a machine. He has refused to participate in this, openly declaring his anarchy, without hypocrisy. He is his own judge and jury, and this will never be forgiven by the honourable and the justices.

Today, 15th of September 1994, seven years later, he resides in a cell in a FIES unit in the maximum-security prison of Picassent in Valencia. The FIES system, rightly judged to be the toughest in Spain,

was created in 1991 by the Prison Administration to put a stop to the landslide of riots, kidnappings and escapes which swept over the whole Spanish penal system that summer, and which continues to this day, despite being officially ended by Royal Decree 787/84 on the 26th of March. There, isolated from the rest of the prison population in a brutal manner, we find some of the FIES prisoners, considered by the Directorate General of Penal Institutes to be the most troublesome prisoners, or specialists in escape. On top of the sentence of two years, four months and a day that led to his jailing, he has acquired an additional sentence of over seventy-one years without parole, which is in the process of being tripled for various infractions.

He now dedicates his time to studying, reading, and practising sports in his spare time. Like many before him he faced two paths: submission or rebellion. He chose the second option, and they will not forgive him for doing so. As a result, he faces a vengeance that started years before and which will only end in escape, submission, or death which, slow and cruel, plays and amuses itself with him in the form of AIDS. He knows it and so he started writing the first lines of a manuscript in which he would describe the spectre of prison, and tell of the failure of the penitentiary system with its cruel archaic punishments (at the very least in need of an urgent review, and therefore reform of the laws that regulate it). His experience is the best example of the application of systematic methods that turn many men into beasts. In these pages there is a place for all those prisoners in whose hearts friendship, hope, and freedom shine out, in spite of the savage methods they are subjected to, and the fact that most of them suffer from AIDS. This book is dedicated to them in particular because they represent the valour of some men who, confronted daily with death, are alone with their pride and their fears in icy, lonely cells, but who still hold onto their highest hope. It is dedicated to these valiant heroes who fight bravely to die in the arms of the one undeniable and uncontrollable right of man—Freedom.

Picassent, August 15, 1994

Part 1: The Way of Corruption

To be, or not to be, that is the question—
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep,—
No more

W. Shakespeare

La Coruña Prison, 29 August 1987

At first sight it is curious, with its square shape and old stone walls, eroded by the humidity and the saltpetre from the nearby sea. However, its sad appearance and the grave silence that surrounds it, along with the slow walk of the guards who keep watch with machine guns, allow you to imagine the long years of suffering that those walls contain.

The prison of La Coruña, situated in front of the Roman monument of Hercules' Tower, is a squat old building, over whose entrance flies a Spanish flag caressed by the sea breeze. So it appeared before me once more, as the transport van rounded the last corner before the jail.

“Here we are, Tarrío,” one of the cops shouted at me.

Yes, we had arrived. A final drag on the cigarette and I squashed it against the metal floor of the van with my shoe. The door opened, and, after a cautious inspection of the handcuffs I was wearing, I was escorted to the entrance of the prison. We were met by an ill-humoured prison guard nicknamed “The Toad” for his considerable jowls. I had new fingerprints taken and they took off the handcuffs. Later, after the paperwork was completed, the police officers left, finally leaving me in the hands of the Penal Institute. My life, my freedom, and my emotions were now at the mercy of the whims of the jailers who manage and control the men in prison. There, they

were the police, the law, and the judge, and acted with total impunity. This is prison. Several guards came to get me.

“Man, Tarrío, you’re back again?” one of them said to me.

“Back again,” I said, seriously, not feeling like engaging in conversation.

They made me strip completely, which is mandatory and normal for all new inmates, to make sure they don’t try to smuggle in anything from the outside. I knew the entire procedure. It wasn’t for nothing that I was a regular at this prison; it had only been two months since I had left, after six months inside. After the registration I was taken to the youth wing because of my age.

I met up with some friends who came to greet me.

“What happened, José?” they asked when I came over.

“Nothing serious, two years and a bit. Can you guys get me sheets, clothes, food, and some tobacco too, ok? We’ll have plenty of time to talk about the rest later.”

I had to spend three days alone in a cell. This isolation did nothing useful, but was mandatory for new inmates. After those three days I could walk in the yard and move to another cell with my friends. Meanwhile, I had to stay there.

Once we got to the cell, the guard escorting me said:

“The cell is pretty dirty, so later we’ll get a scrubbing brush and bleach so you can clean it.”

“I’d also like to use the shower.”

“You’ll have to wait until the afternoon. Are you going up to eat?”

“No, I’m waiting on some food and clothes, hopefully I’ll get them.”

“All right,” he said, closing the door behind him.

An empty feeling flooded the cell and loneliness crept over me. I threw myself belly up onto the dirty mattress with my hands behind my head, thinking. It’s payback time, I thought, but where does society get the moral right to call this justice? Two years, four months

and a day of my life—for a simple robbery with no violence? Is it really a fair penalty or is it an excessive sentence handed down by a judge who wanted to make me taste the bitterness of an exemplary punishment? And another thing: what is the limit of the State's self-granted right to punish? Who controls this punishment and for how long is it legal or humane to extend it?

Fond memories came to replace my ruminations, some of which faded away over the passage of time, some of which, with time, would wilt, while others were reinforced. I felt devastated.

In the afternoon I got some food, clothes, and tobacco from my friends. I also got a full bucket of bleach, a scrubbing brush, and a broom. I went down to take a shower; clean clothes made me feel better. I washed and bleached the cell and put clean sheets on the bed. I paced the cell until dinner time. It was small. About four metres wide by three and a half metres long. Like the rest of the cells it was painted white. The walls showed years of accumulated filth. Without a doubt it had been a long time since they were painted. On them I could read phrases like *a mother's love, guards are sons of bitches, I was born to suffer*, or names and dates. These walls had been the only confidante for many of the men locked up here, far from all human warmth, and so it would continue.

The window had been covered on the outside with a metal plate to prevent the prisoners from seeing the countryside or the sea. The bed was metal and bolted to the floor. A light bulb, a sink and a toilet flush with the ground completed the furnishing of the cell. It was as squalid as every other cell I'd known.

After pacing for a while it was dinnertime. I ate sitting on the bed, since there was no chair or table. Shortly after I lit a cigarette, undressed and got into bed. I was tired and soon fell asleep.

Once the three days were over one of the head wardens came to see me.

"Tarrío, I have bad news for you," he said. "The director has ordered an Article 10. We have to put you in isolation."

“Why? I just got here,” I asked, disturbed.

“I don’t know Tarrío, but I think it has something to do with the protest you and your friend Eduardo had last time you were here. You left with Article 10 status...”

“Right.”

Abruptly I was taken to isolation. It was one of many abuses that happened daily in this prison. The worst thing was that I couldn’t do anything about it, so I shut up, gathered my belongings, and walked to the isolation wing. From the windows my friends called to me.

“Hey José, where are you going?”

“Guess where,” I said joking.

“No fucking way!” said one of them, leaning out a window.

“Bingo!”

I picked the biggest cell and got set up there. I had gained a few more centimetres of floor space, a table, a chair, and a window with bars but without a metal plate, which allowed me to see the yard and the police barracks. I trusted they would take me out of there soon. For them, isolating me was synonymous with peace, since I had a violent temper at times and was frequently involved in fights. They had me pegged as one with a confrontational attitude. So I took it easy. From now on I only had two hours a day on the yard on my own.

That month they let me have visits. My uncles came to see me and Isa came with them. They told me the news of the death of my cousin Lute. That hit me hard, as he was a good friend of mine. I’d been staying with him for the last few years. His death didn’t surprise me, though, since his life revolved around drugs and everyone knew it would be the death of him. I spoke to Isa.

“Hi princess, thanks for coming...”

“Hi Che. You know I will always come and see you when you are in prison. I haven’t failed you yet, have I?”

“How are you?” I asked her.

“Well. Wishing you could get out of here. I miss you.”

I loved her company. When her dear mother died her father

married again and between him and his wife they made her life unbearable. Submerged in a world of unhappiness, she fled what should have been a home. Now she lived with her friends.

One day—I still don't know why—my friend Viqueira wanted to hit her after an argument. I was opposed to this. I had never noticed her before, but nonetheless, the act of defending her from my friend would bring us together, starting a serious relationship. Now we spoke, ignorant of the harsh future that we could barely imagine.

“You have to take an AIDS test, José,” interrupted my uncle Suso.

Although I was in principle opposed to the idea, I finally relented and promised them I'd do it.

My family's concerns were confirmed: I was carrying AIDS antibodies. I was HIV positive. The raw and brutal reality of this news hit me full in the face. It was a serious blow to my spirit, so hard for someone only nineteen years old. Nonetheless, I knew that feeling sorry for myself would not help with anything and that I needed to make some serious decisions about my drug use and my life. I decided to quit drugs and start taking care of my body with regular exercise. I wanted to fight the sickness and live to the last breath, savouring the last years of my life that my body's resistance to the virus offered me. I would fight. I was sure of that.

Pereiro de Aguiar prison, November 1987

One month after I got the news about HIV that changed the course of my life, I was transferred to the prison in Orense. I made the trip alone in a small van. Once at my new destination I had to strip. I did so and after I had dressed again I was taken to an isolation unit where I was the sole occupant. They gave me a set of sheets and a blanket as well as some toiletries: two rolls of toilet paper, a toothbrush, some toothpaste and a bar of soap. I was grateful; at least here they took hygiene and cleanliness a little more seriously than in La Coruña.

The prison in Orense, in Pereiro de Aguiar, was new and modern. That is why all the cells were in good condition. They were big and clean. The windows didn't have bars on them and had triple-layered bulletproof glass. It was supposed to give the jail a more humane appearance, to try to make the prisoners feel more free and less locked up. Nothing could be further from the truth. The beds were made of concrete and on top of them lay a clean hard mattress. The toilet had its own room and even had a door. The sink was made of stainless steel and was set in another block of concrete. Above it was a mirror stuck on the wall. It was furnished with a chair and a table, again both made from concrete. Perhaps they intended to tame people's spirits in relative comfort? I had to admit that in comparison to the dungeon I was in before, this was much more comfortable to live in.

The next day they took me out for a walk in a medium-sized yard. I was surprised. There were four patches of garden, one in each corner. The small shrubs seemed ironic and were truly hilarious. It was a sick joke in bad taste. Their sense of justice often had such minute details. Did they hope some of these plants would talk to me, or me to them?

It was lawful to take a man and subject him to constant silence, as long as it was done in an elegant, civilized manner.

This prison was run by José Ignacio Bermudez, a psychologist who had recently risen to the position of Director. I didn't know it then but years later this man would reappear in my life. I would have the opportunity to understand first hand the entire range of psychological techniques that he would use as director of the prison in Dueso in Santander. But that is another story.

The days passed without incident, and I got used to the loneliness and the silence. I started to enjoy reading. I was transferred back to La Coruña for a trial at the provincial court, along with my friend Eduardo Jean-Baptiste Álvarez, on an assault charge. *Chico* had been arrested a few days before, accused of various bank robberies. I met him there.

“What happened?” I asked after embracing him on the way to the court.

“They’ve charged me with a bank job but they don’t have any proof.”

“Good, you might be out in a few months.”

“I hope so, partner, I hope so.”

The van stopped and we were let out, handcuffed together and escorted by a group of cops who were in a good mood. They brought us up to the second floor and put us in a small room. As we went in I could see Isa in the public area, where she’d come to see me. She was with her friend Sandra, who later would become my friend’s companion. The guard let me have a minute with her.

“Hi princess, how are you?”

“I’m well, and you? We’ll see if they bring you to La Coruña so I can see you like before.”

“I don’t know if they’ll bring me back here. When I’m so far away they can do anything they want to me.”

“I sent you a bunch of letters, with photos, did you get them?”

“Yes, I liked them a lot... thanks, sweetheart.”

We were smiling. We knew this relationship was something out of the ordinary—well out of the ordinary. Through it, doubts turned into joys. It was like recovering our lost childhoods, acting without shame, being children once again. She was a girl full of life, of illusions, of fantasies, whose presence transformed me, with no room for doubts.

The trial went ahead without delay, and as usual. The pantomime of a group of adults playing at divine justice left me cold. This time was particularly ridiculous. The court-appointed defence was a joke. Only the public prosecutor showed some moments of verbal skill, arguing for a harsh sentence, eager to climb the ladder of his filthy career.

At the end of the proceedings we were sent back to prison. My friend also had an Article 10 applied and so the two of us were moved to the same wing. We greeted the friends who called to us

from out of the windows of the cells as we walked across the yard to the isolation wing. A strong camaraderie existed between us all.

The next day I was taken once again to the prison in Orense. There the monotony resumed, this time accompanied by a pair of prisoners who had been transferred there from the main wing to serve isolation terms. I was on good behaviour due to a promise from the Director to rescind the Article 10 by the middle of December. I received a lot of postcards from Isabel and spent many hours sitting at the table writing lengthy letters in return. We told each other all our secrets, worries, and desires. Her constant letters filled the emptiness that exists in all isolation units. It did me good. She always asked me for advice about every important aspect of her life. She was simply charming. I also got letters from my friend Chico. We helped make each other laugh at the administration because all the mail between prisoners was opened and read. That is how I learned that he was being transferred to the prison in Teruel, sadly notorious for the stabbings and murders that happened continually between prisoners held there. I wished him luck. As far as the director, he kept his word, and in mid-December the Article 10 was lifted, and I was transferred to La Coruña.

La Coruña prison, December 1987

At La Coruña a little surprise from the administration was waiting for me. Despite the Article 10 having been lifted, I was still subject to a mixed regime for preventative measures. This meant that I would only go out to the yard with the rest of the solitaires; the remaining time would be spent in my cell. Once more the impunity of the head guards became evident, before the total passivity of the Court of Vigilance that was charged with overseeing the implementation of the rules. I didn't have any option but to accept this situation. It was always better than getting another Article 10. Nevertheless I got to share a cell with my friend Miguel Expósito, who found himself

in the same situation.

Isabel and I resumed communication. She would come visit without fail and we would talk about the future. For her 17th birthday I gave her a gold necklace with a four-leaf clover ring for good luck. She had become the most important person in my life. Sometimes my father also came to see me. We made an effort, but the past was never spoken of. He hadn't known how to be a good father to me or a good husband to my mother and the latter couldn't be forgiven. But at that point, for me, the most important thing was for time to pass, quickly if possible. Two and a half years of jail wasn't much, all in all. The idea of AIDS didn't torture me too much, although I was conscious that my life could end in any of the coming years. There was no effective medication and nothing could be done. I assumed it as part of the cost of living. For now I made plans for when I got my freedom again. I had asked Isa if she wanted to live with me at a place I was renting in the Labañou neighbourhood, where I lived with my father when he would come back from Gran Sol, where he worked as a captain on a fishing boat. I would try to live surrounded by those I most loved: my friends.

One afternoon while walking with Miguel, a prisoner that we knew by the nickname *Fito* came to talk to me and pass on a message that several cons from El Ferrol wanted to talk to me, and asked me to meet them in their cell. I was suspicious of them, I'd had run-ins with a few of them before and I knew they held a grudge. Now they had grown in number and I only had my friend Miguel on my side, but I wasn't worried. I went up accompanied by my friend and with a shank in the pocket of my coat as a precaution. I found them together in their cell.

"Fito said you wanted to see me," I said.

"Yeah, El Vaca here wants a word with you."

"Yes," said the aforementioned El Vaca, "it's about what you said this morning about Amadeo."

“Look, Vaca, Amadeo’s been a good friend of mine for ten years, you know? So if you have some problem with him talk it out with me and we’ll settle this business now.”

Then he stood up and took a knife out of his waistband, bigger than mine. He challenged me:

“How do you want it, fists or knives?”

“Knives,” I said coldly, hiding my fear.

We went down to the canteen and went inside. To the side there was a small room that we went into.

He picked one of his friends to watch his back while we fought. I had Miguel. The rest went out to the yard, keeping watch to make sure guards didn’t come near us. The fight started. We faced off, waving the blades, both right-handed and we tested, thrusting a few times without much conviction. The two of us were scared, who would win would be decided either on who overcame that best, or on a stroke of luck. We exchanged swipes and the blade of my opponent’s knife went into my body between my shoulder and my chest. It sent a wave of pain through me. I acted as if I hadn’t noticed; otherwise, it would encourage him. His knife and his arm were both longer than mine, which put me at a disadvantage, but nevertheless his eyes told me he was more scared than I was, and I took advantage of this. We swapped some more jabs, during which I cut his stomach lightly with the tip of my blade. This made him back off, scared, and leaving the room, he lay down on one of the tables in the canteen. Fear totally overcame him. I invited him to keep fighting but he wouldn’t. We all agreed to leave it at that.

That night my friend Miguel cleaned my wound in the cell. It wasn’t serious, but it bled a lot. My shirt was full of blood. They had wanted to test my manhood. Small things mattered a lot in prison, especially among the younger inmates. If you didn’t stand up for yourself, no one, absolutely no one, would respect you. This was prison. To refuse a fight was the same as admitting that you were a coward in the eyes of others. It would mean a big blow to my pride,

which I wasn't going to accept. I preferred to risk my life in front of a cold blade than to suffer the dishonour of being considered a coward. Youth is the biggest enemy of the young, and I was no exception. I lacked the maturity to consider this stupid. At that point in my life, pride and arrogance were the most important things, together with courage; to show and maintain my manliness was the only important thing. All the young men in this prison wanted to be hard, and the jail constantly offered that possibility. It was the Coruñan school of crime. Here we learned to be better criminals.

Despite the precautions we had taken, the administration ended up hearing about the fight. The investigation found me responsible. It was the first step towards my being classified at the highest level of security. I was bullied shamelessly, so I had no problem resuming my bad behaviour right from where I had left it.

Christmas came and went without trouble or fanfare. We celebrated with apple cider fermented in secret. My classification continued to rise. I knew they would take any opportunity to get rid of me so I wasn't surprised when one morning in February I was woken by some guards.

"Tarrío, get your stuff together, you're being moved."

"Where to?"

"To Zamora."

I got dressed, put all my stuff in a few sports bags and said goodbye to my friends. Without much ado I was taken towards the entrance gate, escorted by several guards, where some cops were waiting for me. Other prisoners were there, handcuffed together, in pairs. I was the last to arrive. They took the fingerprints they needed from me as from the rest of the cons, and we were led two by two into a big green van that waited at the gates of the prison. Once my possessions were put into the luggage compartment, we drove towards the prison in León where we would spend the night, to continue the journey the next day.

The conditions of the transfer were an insult to the men crowded in there. That is how I took it. Whoever had designed the cages of this transporter must have had his soul poisoned with hate. Inside metal cages one metre deep and half as wide, each containing two seats welded to the floor, they moved prisoners over hundreds of kilometres. We had to remain seated and hunched over for the whole journey, enduring the cold and the different smells which intermingled with the cigarette smoke. The hygiene was conspicuous in its absence, and constant vomiting made the atmosphere of human misery even stronger. I considered this excessive and cruel. It revolted me. Let no honourable citizen ever be surprised that people transported in such disgusting conditions will respond with violence!

In Léon, after six hours of travelling we were taken into the holding cells in groups of four. In spite of having been given a bite to eat when leaving La Coruña, we were starving. They fed us hot lentils, and my companions and I had no trouble finishing off several plates each. We wanted to get our energy back. At eight the following morning we continued the journey. I was sent on to Zamora, and my companions were taken to the prison at Carabanchel in Madrid, which was the normal route.

Zamora Prison, February 1988

It was situated on the Almaraz highway, three kilometres out of the city. It was where I would be placed in the first grade regime.

“José Tarrío González!” cried one of the cops.

“Here,” I answered, banging on the door of the cage.

The door was opened and after handcuffing me they took me outside. I was grateful for the fresh air and I stretched my legs out a bit. Constantly watched over by a group of cops, some armed with Cetme guns, I gathered up my belongings and walked with them towards the inside of the prison. It was a building of reinforced concrete and stone, painted in a bland cream colour, with an older

style. Considered maximum security, inside in Units 1 and 2 it held the most troublesome under-21 prisoners in Spain. The rest of the prison population were second grade prisoners, housed in different units. Units one and two had been inhabited by prisoners from the GRAPO organisation, who had since been dispersed. They were dislodged to make room for the youth of the recently closed prison in Teruel, in the hope of putting a stop to the prisoner confrontations by means of the harshest repression.

I crossed the long compound and observed the strategic location of the Guardia Civil sentries. I went up the stairs with my bags in my hands to the admissions office. Several electronic doors opened and I went through them. A cop took off my handcuffs and some guards took me to a room. They made me undress and do various squats and stretches to show that I didn't have anything hidden up my ass. I was humiliated, but I obeyed. After this affront to my pride, I was assigned a cell in isolation called "the tube" because of its cylindrical shape. Once again, I couldn't walk around. There was a metal heater but because of the tremendous cold it seemed like it didn't work or was never turned on in order to save a few pennies. It didn't take long to prove my second theory correct. There was a steel bed, welded to the floor. There was also a chair with its table, of the same metal and also welded to the floor. A sink, a toilet, a small mirror and a couple of windows completed the furniture. It wasn't much. There wasn't even a wardrobe to put clothes in.

I immediately tried to contact Chico. I knew from messages passed on through Isa that he was here. His presence calmed me. I hadn't heard anything good about these adolescent outlaws who had become my new fellow inmates. I was a bit frightened, but ready to hold my head up as high as the rest of them, to win the respect of them all.

I made contact with my friend through notes that I sent with the person in charge of cleaning or through the windows on threads passed along from one to the other until they found their destination. We all collaborated in this, so we could always send each

other messages, certain that everyone would help them on their way. Chico told me that he might be getting out in a few days according to his lawyer. He promised to come visit me.

I started to go out to a small yard, situated behind the unit and in front of the women's wing. There were serious rivalries between various groups of prisoners from different regions. Relations between Galicians, Andalucians, Catalans, Valencians, etc. were very tense, stemming from old rivalries in Teruel. The administration had given express orders that at the least sign of insubordination we would be reprimanded without a second thought. This was the climate I found in the first few days when I arrived at Zamora. The administration hoped that what had happened in Teruel wouldn't happen in Zamora, but burdened with its usual stupidity it made a grave error. Many of the prisoners' hearts were stubbornly infected with the pus of hatred. There had been deaths, rapes, stabbings, and abuses of every type that no one would forget. In the years '85, '86 and '87, the prisoners lived in groups according to their hometowns. Madrileños, Catalans, Galicians... everyone defended their territory, grouped like this in clans. This had divided the prisoners and produced the first battles for control of the yard. The unions—which in principle acted in defence of each group against the others—turned into power and this turned into abuse. Half the prison population needed to be protected from the other half and had to be separated one from the other. It got to the point where the only law respected was that of the knife. Newcomers had to show their strength and the ones that failed were robbed, stabbed, and marginalised. Others had to perform oral sex on other prisoners to save their lives or were repeatedly raped by their fellow inmates. Those who had worse luck died, stabbed to death. Now the same mistakes from Teruel were being repeated: everyone was reunited in a new prison. This would open up old wounds. Instead of dispersing everyone to different locations, avoiding the recurrence of hate and its consequent violence, we were reunited again in this jail. How many men have died because of the

incompetence of the administration!

On top of this, the unavoidable fact of being a Galician earned me many new enemies, who, seriously damaged by other Galician prisoners, saw me as a potential victim to satisfy their revenge. All this, combined with my own personal circumstances, would later drive me to kill someone accidentally. I would pay a high price for my inexperience.

I met him one morning while I was walking alone on the small yard of the isolation unit. He appeared out of a window that looked out from the showers into the main yard, and called out.

“Hey, are you Che from La Coruña?”

His face was serious and his skin was dark. His hair was short, and on his forehead I could make out a tattoo of a four leafed clover.

“Yeah that’s me,” I answered, approaching the window.

“I am Musta de Vigo.” He held out his hand.

We shook hands firmly, then he continued:

“Watch your back here, everyone carries a knife with bad intentions. Do you have a knife?”

“I don’t have problems with anyone here.”

“It doesn’t matter. You are Galician and that is reason enough to get you attacked some day, and here being attacked is so normal it doesn’t even get reported, understand?”

I understood perfectly. We continued talking for a few minutes and then parted. His words made me think, and I decided to make a knife just in case. Without knowing it, I had met this man who would become a great friend. Sometimes, in the worst times you find the best.

A few days later, Chico was let out. I was switched to another cell and was allowed to walk on the main yard with the other prisoners in small groups. It was a big yard, with a handball court, toilets, and a cafeteria. The windows of the three storey main unit looked onto the yard. I left the knife I had made with one of the prisoners who

occupied these cells. If I was on the yard and problems started, he was ready at the window and could easily throw me the knife.

In this way we managed to make a mockery of the metal detectors, which we passed through to get onto the yard. We also had other tricks but the point was to be armed. To have a weapon was very important: it showed the others that you were ready to fight. We lived in a true cold war.

I continued my relationship with my fellow Galician Musta through notes. Sometimes we ended up on the yard at the same time and we talked about personal issues, political thoughts, or the future. On one occasion he told me his life story. His name was Gabriel Pombo Da Silva and even though he felt himself to be Galician, he was born in Germany where his parents had emigrated years before. Like me he was the son of immigrants. He had also been sent to the RETO (reformatory) in Madrid, but a few years before my stint there. We laughed at the coincidences. He had been jailed at sixteen for some hold-ups. He was a bank-robber. Now he was serving five years and had been inside for four. I liked him. Bonds of affection were forged on the anvil of a pact of mutual loyalty. We had both started to toil towards a mutual goal: Friendship. I missed him a lot when he was sent to the Central Observation in Madrid for reclassification.

In the month of August I had my first problems. Some prisoners, which ones I didn't discover, sent someone to test me out. This guy, who needed to prove himself to the others, came to challenge me in the yard. You could sense a fight in the air, just like every time something went down. I wasn't long in seeing it. A prisoner walked towards me.

"Hey," he loudly addressed me, "do you have a cigarette?"

I offered him a pack of Ducados and looked towards the windows of the wing. It was full of prisoners, among them one of my friends who was ready to throw a knife into the yard if he thought I needed it. I didn't ask for it.

“Give me a light,” this prisoner said to me, giving back my tobacco.

I offered him my lighter, which he put in his pocket after lighting his cigarette. This was an open provocation, in response to which my right fist went towards his face. A fight started where we exchanged blows, ending up rolling around on the ground. It took a lot for me to get away from him, but when I did I got up quickly and finished the fight with a kick to his head. At the same time a group of guards came out armed with clubs to separate us. They took my adversary first, beating him repeatedly with their batons. Then all the prisoners were sent back to their cells, leaving me last. The guards came down to get me. They surrounded me. The clubs they had in their hands didn't bode well for my physical well-being, for which I feared. One of them said to me:

“Come here and take your hands out of your pockets. I want them away from your body, move!”

I took my hands from my track pants pockets and held them away from my body. Then I walked towards the room they were in. They surrounded me.

“Strip,” one of them ordered.

I started to strip off my sneakers and pants and when I went to take off my shirt, they started to rain down blows everywhere. I fell to the ground stunned, while many kicks landed on my body. When they got tired and they thought I'd had enough, they stopped.

“Get your clothes and let's go!” they ordered.

I got up as best I could, straightening myself out. I gathered my things and I was marched in front of them to solitary. My head was ringing with a long whistle that impaired my thinking. Without a doubt the Administration would justify such measures as essential to maintaining order. That is how Prison Regulation thought. Society could be proud of the rigorous application of the laws that rule it, and of the spectacle of ten men against one, naked and helpless. It could be proud because all this was done in its name.

I was put inside one of the tubular cells, and after closing the gate which protected the door, they closed the door and left. Once alone, I looked in the mirror. My lips were swollen and a blow from the sole of a shoe had left its mark on my cheek. My shoulders and legs were red and the next day due to the lack of platelets in my body, it turned into massive bruising. I felt humiliated and helpless. The nakedness of my body made me feel defenceless, so I got dressed. I swore to myself I would never forget. For the moment I could do nothing more.

A month after this event my friend Musta arrived back at Zamora. We were in contact right away through notes and we recounted what had happened to us in the last while. He had been refused a lower grade and they had sent him back. As for the rest, the routine of prison continued to devour us daily. There weren't any activities or entertainment other than playing handball. It was a dull, brutish regime, like the one in Teruel. Tomorrow would be a photocopy of today, the day after a photocopy of tomorrow, and so on forever. We spent two hours on the yard each day so we could get some fresh air and we spent the rest of the day in isolation inside a cell. We were shown pure hard repression.

One afternoon, several prisoners, among them my friend, started banging on their cell doors in protest against something that had happened. I had no idea what was going on as I was isolated in the tube. However a prisoner called to me through the window.

"Hey is that Che?"

"What's up?" I answered, showing myself.

"They're beating Musta."

I didn't need to know any more to guess what was happening. I started to smash the glass in the windows and roused the other prisoners by shouting to ask who would back me up, but only a couple of other guys joined in. Fear had most of them terrorized, like me. The idea of a group of screws going into a cell to beat someone

with impunity didn't please anyone. This fear was implanted with clubs, the work tools of these thugs. They didn't know any other way to behave. Drunk on abuse, they left my friend to come to my cell. The door opened.

"What's the matter with you, faggot?" shouted one of them.

"Open the gate," ordered the Head Warden to another of them.

More from fear than bravery, I refused to let them come into the cell, wielding broken glass in my hands, with which I threatened them.

"I'll charge whoever comes through that door."

The truth was that I wasn't brave enough. I was too scared.

"Tarrío," said the leader of the group to me, "put down the glass and don't make things any worse."

"No one comes in here," I affirmed loudly.

They left. When they came back they had anti-riot gear: helmets, clubs, shields, sprays and handcuffs.

"Tarrío, are you going to come out and cooperate?" yelled someone from outside the door.

"No."

They started to spray gas under the door. I tried to counteract by covering up with a blanket in the toilet but it did no good. The gas burned my lungs and face. My eyes burned and shed copious tears. Lacking experience of these situations, I didn't know that the best defence against this type of tear gas attack was to get face down on the ground and breathe through a wet towel. It was unbearable and after five minutes I was finished.

"All right, all right... I surrender!"

"Strip and throw the glass under the door. Then come out with your hands behind your head. Understand?"

"Yes, but open the door, I'm choking..."

I threw the glass under the door and started to strip. Through the peephole an eye stared at me. Once I was naked, the door opened. A large number of guards waited for me in the corridor. They opened

the cage and stood back from the door.

“All right, come out...”

I went out as they had told me. I had barely stepped out of the door when a guard hidden behind the door hit me across the head from behind. This was the signal and the rest of his companions joined the party. They beat me for about a minute. Immediately afterwards I was put into an empty cell and handcuffed to the leg of the bed with my arms behind my head, lying flat on the floor. It was an uncomfortable position. Then they left. As well as being stunned by the beating I could hear how the other prisoners who had backed me up were being visited by the guards. Cries, fear... and a painful silence filled the halls crying out in disgust and impotence.

Night came, and with it the coldness of early October. My arms went numb, immobilised with the circulation cut off by the pressure of the handcuffs on my wrists. My feet followed with an unbearable pain. The cold punished my naked body, causing sharp pains in my extremities. The impossibility of changing position made me understand the skill with which the guards carried out their jobs. I couldn't contain myself and I broke down crying. It was the longest night of my life. There was never a night in prison that caused me such physical damage as this one. It was truly barbaric. It was something unforgettable which made the hatred inside me scream. I had no doubts after this. It was the revenge of a society that gutlessly used go-betweens for its enforcement.

The following morning, shrivelled on the floor and stoically striving to not humiliate myself and beg my torturers for an end to this punishment, I was seen by a doctor.

“Take off the shackles, get him clothes and a hot breakfast...” he ordered.

He seemed accustomed to this scenario and knew perfectly well what to prescribe for recovery. I hated this bastard with all my soul. I hated society. I hated all of humanity. I hated because I had learned to hate.

After they had uncuffed me, it took me a long time to regain movement in my limbs. My arms and legs had seized up. They left me to dress myself in my cell and gave me milk and bread with butter for breakfast. I ate slowly to gain some time. When I'd finished they cuffed me again, but now to a bar on the gate, with my hands in front of me, which allowed me to sit on the floor without pain. They left me alone.

I got a nice visit. The cleaner knocked on the door and put some cigarettes under it with a note from Musta.

"Pass me a lit one," I asked him.

He lit a cigarette and threw it to me. He pretended to scrub the floor in front of my cell and left. I thanked him for the gesture. I smoked the cigarettes, one after the other, as I read the note. He sent me greetings and some encouragement. That incident would unite us forever. Several days later, he was moved to Daroca and I was transferred back to La Coruña to be present at another trial.

La Coruña, November 1988

As the van brought me to La Coruña, I thought that I might again see Isa, who I hadn't seen in a long time. I was surprised that I hadn't had any news from her lately, and this had me worried. I thought about this, while observing out of the small barred window of the cage I was in, the beautiful countryside of my native Galicia. These green mountains were a huge contrast with the dryness of the Castilian plain.

At the prison they put me straight into isolation. There I found Lolín and Chafi, both friends of mine. They had also been given an Article 10. They had recently been sentenced to several years in jail for a kidnapping and armed robbery of a home. We talked through the windows, when to my surprise the door opened and I was brought to the visiting room. In one of the booths was my father.

"Hey old man, how's it going?"

“Good, José. I found out you were being moved here today so I called and asked to see you. Viqueira and Chico are outside.”

“Why didn’t they come in?”

“Listen son, I have some bad news and I think it’s best if I tell you alone,” he said, looking at the floor. Then his head came up, and facing me, he let it out.

“Isa is dead.”

I was stunned, unable to take in the news. With my eyes fixed on the floor, I asked him, shocked:

“How?”

“A motorcycle accident. She was hit by a car running a red light... She was pregnant. José! Don’t do anything stupid, ok?”

I couldn’t hear him any more. I turned and left without saying anything. I needed to be alone to think about it, out of sight of others. How could I express such grief? How would anyone understand such love? I took refuge in myself, alone in the cell. There I cried bitterly over the death of my friend, offering a goodbye to her physical presence. I sank into my grief, getting lost in my confused thoughts, in a vain attempt to bring her back from the world of the dead:

I woke up this morning, my love, and you were not there;
desperate and lost, I looked for you and didn’t find you.

So I called you, but you didn’t answer,
and I wept in your absence, broken.

Whose torn cries ring like mine
off the concrete in cold dawns?

Then I heard a cry
that called to me from the dampness of this cage.

I know, my friend, this murderous hatred
of this homicidal rage that knows
that they’ve made us live a yesterday/tomorrow
Robbed of the present.

Now, going anywhere but death
student of red glory in universities of blood,

I wait for my moment to reunite with you in a final assault,
united by the tragicomedy of life and nothingness...
once and for all.

I didn't sleep that night. An enormous sensation of emptiness filled my cell, a void larger than ever. I had to get out somehow. I had to escape—I needed to.

The following morning the guards were in a good mood and they opened the door to the isolation wing, to let me clean and chat a bit with my friends. We talked through one of the grilles.

I received good wishes from everyone, and their condolences. They knew the importance of this lady in my life. Afterwards I talked with Lolín and Chafi. I explained to them my desire to escape, and asked if they wanted to come with me, but they didn't. However Lolín offered me a new saw, which I thanked him for. I didn't talk to anyone else and started my preparations. If they didn't want to come with me I would leave on my own.

The window of the cell I occupied overlooked the front of the complex and the entrance to the prison. A few metres beyond stood the police barracks, where the relief for the sentry boxes came from, but this wasn't a serious problem. The real problem was the two sentry boxes that watched over this part of the compound, placed in the corners at each side. I would have to risk it and count on having some luck.

I was taken to court with some other prisoners. It was a trial for the illegal use of a motor vehicle, which passed off without incident. They gave me a fine but I didn't care. I let the judge know. His laws were not mine.

On 26 November I finished sawing through the bars on the window. I had also made a rope by tying together some bed sheets. In front of the cell, a streetlight came up over the wall. My idea was to throw the rope over it, grab the other end and climb the wall. Outside

Chico and Viqueira would be waiting in a car. As for the police, a piece of mirror would let me watch them without being seen.

That night, at four thirty, theory passed into action. I dressed in dark clothes and prepared to leave the cell. I coiled the rope around my waist, went to the window and pulled out the bars. I looked both ways with the mirror. I was alone. I went out the window and jumped down without making a sound. I quickly crossed the open space and went towards the lamp-post, hitting the wall. I hadn't been noticed but my heart was pounding. I uncoiled the rope from my waist and I got ready to throw it when one of the policemen saw me.

"Don't make a move, boy!" he shouted at me, aiming his gun. He radioed for backup and they rushed out of the barracks towards me.

"Hit the ground," ordered the sentry.

I dropped. You don't argue with someone aiming a submachine gun at your chest. Several guards surrounded and handcuffed me, and took me back to the barracks. There they interrogated me. There was nothing to say other than cursing my bad luck; I had played and I had lost; that was all.

At dawn they brought me back to the prison. In the entrance I was met by a group of guards, led by a Head Warden. They uncuffed me to bring me to another room where they made me strip.

"You'll see," said the warden. "What? Are you trying to get us fired?" he asked, hitting me with his club.

The others didn't intervene. I got hit some more but couldn't do anything to defend myself. To fight back would mean being beaten by the rest of the guards. Right after this they took me to isolation, where they handcuffed me to the bed by both hands. They left me like this until the following morning when they came to take me up to the second floor. Up there was the isolation unit used for the worst prisoners. I was taken to a dungeon without windows, dark, damp, and smelly. Then they took off the cuffs and left me alone. On top of the door was a small grate that let in a little light from the fluorescent tubes in the corridor. Besides a dirty mattress, a bucket

with food scraps, the sink, and the toilet, the cell was bare. These dungeons were the inheritance of Franco and were much feared by the prison population. I started walking. Again they were trying to crush my will, by any means necessary, through pain and psychology.

Or were they just trying to avenge my act of freedom? They would suppress human contact and force me to think. Solitude would do the rest. I was put in an uncomfortable position in which, away from everything else, socially castrated without any kind of rights, I would have to confront my thoughts, my losses, my pain.

Isolation is like death to a man, free or in prison. There the prisoner would have to create his own world to overcome the loneliness. Imagination and the cold walls would be his only companions. This is the punishment of the authorities, the henchmen of a society that consents with its silence. Here they created the criminals of tomorrow. I had begun to understand. If the periods of isolation didn't break the will of the rebellious prisoner, if this didn't make him submit, then the punishment could continue indefinitely. Many men had been pushed to suicide in this manner, finding in death the only escape from this prison torture. As for me, I wouldn't give them the pleasure.

Zamora prison, December 1988

Two weeks later I was transferred back to Zamora where I met up with Chafi and Lolín. I also met Anxo, a young guy from Vigo who had been sent down for a bank robbery and who would become a great friend. The days repeated themselves monotonously. Christmas came and a new year started in our lives. Nobody was joyful, nobody really laughed, nothing. In prison there's no place for peace or love.

In January I was taken out of the tube and put in unit one. Anxo was moved to unit two. We maintained regular correspondence through notes that we sent inside batteries, sealed with wire or melted plastic, which we threw into the yards.

With no activities, workshops, or a gym, we spent our time

walking and playing on the court with balls we made ourselves out of wool and breadcrumbs. We gambled for coffee, in singles or pairs. Every day was like this. The worst thing was the constant monotony, which had us at a breaking point.

The unit had been split into two factions. A gypsy from Alicante called Mariano Torres, cocky and spoiled, had brought new quarrels to the unit. I'd already had some problems with him. I had a lot of ill will towards him: he had stabbed a friend of mine in the back some years ago, helped by other prisoners. This time, encouraged by a group of prisoners who backed him up, he had a talk with Lolín in the yard and told him he'd be dead by tomorrow. My friend sent me a note looking for a knife and explaining what had happened. He wanted to stand up to him. He wouldn't stand a chance so I did not give him one. I told the others not to give him one either. Without a knife he couldn't fight.

For personal reasons, I decided to get involved in order to avoid more problems in the future. I would teach him a lesson in passing, in revenge. Neither my friends nor I had forgotten the stabbing of our friend in Teruel. I made myself a blade. I sent it to the yard through the cafeteria along with instructions that it should be hidden in the toilets. I didn't tell anyone my intentions for security purposes.

In the afternoon of 12 February 1989, I went out into the yard at the same time as my adversary. I passed through the metal detector without any problems and went out into the yard. Mariano was walking with another gypsy, from one side to the other, confidently. I went into the toilets and retrieved the knife from its hiding place and put it inside the pocket of my bomber jacket. I went to the cafeteria and got three coffees through the window. Then I called him over.

"What do you want?"

"To get some coffee. Let me treat you two, and let's see if we can talk about Lolín."

"All right."

I started to walk from one side of the yard to the other, while

they stirred sugar into their coffees. My mind was made up. At the smallest lapse in concentration from the guards I would stab him in the guts where it really hurts. This would convince the guards that there were problems with him and he would be moved to another wing.

They joined me in walking. The three of us walked with a hot coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

"Mariano," I said. "This can't go on, we have to forget the past," I lied to him.

"You can't walk all over my turf and expect nothing to happen, Che. You don't have to stand up for someone who won't defend himself. We're in jail and that's how things work, understand?"

"Look," I answered, placing myself on his right. "You know well if you go against my friends I'm going to get involved. Obviously I am morally obligated to keep them from being hurt if possible."

"That's your problem, not mine."

At the same time that he answered me, I saw that the guard had started reading a magazine. In the middle of turning to go back to the other side I put my hand in my pocket and took hold of the knife handle. I looked him in the eyes appearing to listen to him intently, but I could only hear my heart beating with violence in my chest. At the doorway to the barbers I stabbed him in the stomach and shoved it in, where he doubled over clutching his stomach with his hands. I turned to his friend.

"You as well?" I threatened.

"No Che... please, take it easy."

Loyalty to his friend lasted as long as it took him to get scared: no time at all.

We walked. I said to him "Keep quiet about this. You say anything to the guards and you're a dead man, understand?"

"Yes, yes... calm down."

Other prisoners joined us. They agreed that no one would say anything about what happened, not to other prisoners, nor to the

guards. We made a pact of silence. I put the knife in some plastic and threw it into the yard of unit two, where it would disappear. Everything had gone well except for one thing, the knife had gone in too high. Instead of the blade going straight into his intestines, had been angled up so it had cut into the abdominal artery. It had killed him.

At the end of the break on the yard we went back to our cells. They noticed that they were missing a prisoner and started to look for him. They found him dead, as I suspected. In its irony, destiny had decided that the knife that had finished his life belonged to a man whom, years earlier, he had cowardly knifed in the back. He died a victim of his own rules. He had accepted the possibility of his death at the same time that he had chosen his own law and killed another man. All those who carry weapons, inside or outside the law, run the risk of being killed in the same manner that they kill. It was an unwritten law, a law that has ruled the world since time immemorial.

We were isolated by judicial order. Those that made a pact of silence with me kept their word despite repeated threats from the Administration, but it did no good. As it turned out, the knife that I had thrown into the yard of unit two burned in the hands of the prisoners. Even though they had received instructions to hide it, they left it in the hands of a total stranger, an irresponsible guy. This prisoner, a bit suspicious of what was hidden in his cell, called to the door and handed it over to the guards. I found this out when one of the guards came to see me with it in his hand. He showed it to me.

“We’ve got you now, Tarrío. It’s yours, yes? You’re going to pay for all this.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, sir...”

“The knife ended up with one of your companions in unit two and still had blood all over it. You’re all fucked.”

When he left I thought about it. Obviously they would soon get

traces from the knife, and as there was blood there would be no doubt. I was surprised to see the knife in the hands of the guard, still covered in plastic. I cursed my companions for their incompetence and I wondered who had had it, but it was too late. The idiot had disappeared, transferred to an unknown prison. All the same, we would see him in court.

Over the following days we were constantly dragged back and forth to the police station and the court to be interrogated. Finally, trapped by the evidence, I took responsibility for the death and left my friends out of it. It was the right thing to do.

In prison the waters returned to their course. I was once again destined for the tube. One year from being released I had to face murder charges. I was paying a high price for my excess, but I didn't regret the death of this man. I didn't even feel bad about the mountain that loomed over me. They let me call my mother on the phone. She was in Switzerland with my brothers; they had emigrated there a few years back. I told her I had killed a man. It was a heavy blow for her, to hear these words coming from the mouth of her son. That day I killed something inside her. Despite everything, she would be the only person who would show me true unconditional love, at all times.

At the same time a group of prisoners arrived at Zamora from Carabanchel where they had organized some disturbances. Zamora at the time had earned a bad reputation among Spanish prisons and was a synonym for torture. The beatings and abuses broke out again while the Director General of Prisons continued to look the other way.

One morning I had just come back from the yard. Sticking my head out the window, I saw a group of prisoners getting out onto the roof from unit two. It was a riot. At their head were Chafi, Graña, and Bolas from Madrid. I was on the top floor of the tube. They came towards the windows of my cell and talked to me from the roof.

"What's up Che? We've had it up to here with these bastards and we're going to get some revenge," said Chafi.

“Great, but be careful when the riot squad shows up with rubber bullets and smoke grenades. See what you can do to get us out of here... I’m delighted!”

“All right.”

They threw down strips of sheets from the windows, into which we tied several knives for them to defend themselves. They tried to get out of there by climbing down the buttress of the roof but it was too hard, they had to go it alone.

Just a couple of hours later, the riot squad had come into the compound. The companions who were on the roof made barricades out of roofing tiles stacked up, which would also serve as projectiles. Both sides tried to negotiate but didn’t reach any definitive conclusion.

“Stand down or we will have to intervene,” cried the officer who was in charge of a group of at least sixty officers.

“Fuck you, asshole,” answered one of the prisoners.

The hostilities started and we watched impotently as the fierce battle played out under our noses. Some of us showed our support by destroying our cells but we couldn’t do much more. The air was filled with shouting and the sounds of guns firing rubber bullets in response to the tiles that rained down from the roof. After five minutes it stopped and then came a heavy silence. One of the rubber bullets had hit my friend Chafi in the face and his eye was split open. El Bolas had kept Chafi from falling off the roof, saving his life. This finally put an end to the fighting and to the rebellion. The prisoners gave themselves up to allow Chafi to be taken to the hospital for urgent treatment.

After the revolt comes the repression. Cell by cell the guards and the riot squad were taking all our possessions including our clothes, leaving us naked inside our cells. Many companions were beaten. In response we agreed to start a hunger strike, with both units refusing to eat. In response to our actions came various threats from the Directorate, whose only aim was to divide us through

terror. It didn't scare us and even though some of the prisoners ended the strike early, the majority lasted until the end.

The following day the Association of Mothers Against Drugs from Madrid hired buses to come to the prison in Zamora. Their mission: to publicly condemn what was happening against us there. Armed with a megaphone they set up in front of unit one and started to address the guards:

"Leave the kids alone! Bullies! Bastards!", came through the megaphone. When we heard this we came to the windows, adding the sight of our naked bodies as a testament to our situation. The Directors, frightened, sent out their thugs to cover the windows, but it was too late. The mothers, brave and daring, continued their public demonstration, alluding to the jailers with one well-deserved insult after another. The majority of them had sons here or in other prisons. Many of them had lost someone to drugs or AIDS. With bravery, their enormous love led them up that hill to fight in their own way against the unjust prison system, coming to confront the professionals charged with the dirty work of revenge. It was they who won. The directors ordered that we get back all our belongings. They restored our right to walk in the yard and stopped the mistreatment. Several of the people responsible, from the director to the Head Warden, quit their posts, pressured to do so by the Penitentiary Institute, which washed its laundry in public.

Meanwhile the press wrote articles about prisoner mafias, saying that Chafi and I were in charge of them, to justify in some manner the wave of events that had taken place there. If they made us look like gangsters to society, society would approve the methods used to repress us. It made me sick that journalists dared to write this, and that none of them had ever set foot in prison.

They lied shamelessly to society, publishing articles that had been dictated by the Administration, solely intended to repair its tarnished image.

Even though I didn't take part in the rebellion, I was considered

one of the ringleaders. They prepared to transfer me to another prison.

La Parda, prison of Pontevedra, April 1989

This prison was seventy years old. It was old. Very old. I was made to strip at the entrance to pass through the office of a couple of curious jailers. I was then taken to the isolation wing. They had cleared it out to guarantee me solitude and plenty of time to think, which formed part of the repressive regime managed from Madrid. They ably subjected me to this special type of regime, keeping me isolated from the rest of the prisoners. They assigned me to a filthy cell, very small, with a window that looked out onto a small yard. In one of the corners I could see a policeman inside a sentry box no more than twenty metres away. He was my sole companion.

Despite the isolation, some of my friends who were in this prison managed to get in contact with me. I received a message. It was from Rolando, Miguel Expósito, and his brother Javier. They told me, amongst other personal matters, to be wary of the prisoner who served the food as he was an informer. My spirits were lifted by knowing that I wasn't as alone as the Administration wanted me to believe I was.

About seven that evening dinner arrived, brought by the prisoner who I'd been warned about. He served up the tray, and putting it on the floor, I politely asked him for the ladle.

"Please bring the spoon so I can serve myself."

He passed it to me. With him was a guard in the corridor and another one who was just behind the gate that led onto the wing. I served myself some hot soup and a small piece of tortilla. Then I approached him and without a word hit him in the face with the ladle. He shouted and raised his hands to his face.

"I never want to see you around here again," I warned him.

"Tarrío, calm down, what's happening?" interjected the guard.

“None of your business.”

I picked up the tray and went inside the cell, leaving the ladle on the floor of the corridor. I never saw him again.

The days in La Parda went by slowly. I was overwhelmed by this yard, with the guard spying on me constantly from one side and the policeman on the other. Was this a prolonged punishment for my open rebellion? Further pain added to the uncertainty of a future condemned for murder? I felt reduced to nothing.

My father came to see me, accompanied by Rolando's family.

“Hello José, how are you?” he greeted me.

“Not good, they put me in isolation, all alone, I don't see anyone, I can't talk to anybody... I'm going to go crazy...”

We talked during visiting time about this. When it ended we said goodbye. On the way back to isolation I managed to talk to my friends. One of them passed me a note as we shook hands. I hid it from the guard who escorted me. Once in the cell I read it. I recognised Miguel's writing:

Che, I have an escape planned with my brother. It involves kidnapping the guards, sawing one of the bars of the visiting room and from there climbing onto the roof. All this in daytime. From the roof we jump onto the roof of the police barracks, which is about four metres below it. The jump isn't difficult, and from there down onto the street. Are you in?

I waited for the next chance to tell them I was with them, which I wrote in a note. We had to wait for the right moment and to make some knives. They would come to release me after overpowering and gagging the guards. It was a good plan and I thanked my friend for letting me in on it. I was realistic and knew that I would get a lot of years for the murder at Zamora. More, perhaps, than my illness would allow me to live. In any case a quick exit would be better than dying slowly in a cell with my arms crossed. I preferred the possibility of a burst from a machine gun to prison. I believed true

courage in life wasn't found by guarding life like something precious, but in risking it in the search for something better, a true freedom that gave me the real possibility to fulfil myself to the fullest. Life was found outside these walls.

That afternoon, when I was getting ready to go out to the yard, one of the guards brought me the news that some of us prisoners were waiting for.

"Tarrío, did you know Rolando got stabbed today?"

"What? You're joking," I answered.

"No, no, it's true, he was rushed to hospital."

Idiot, I thought to myself, at the same time walking to the yard. Hours later, Radio Nacional gave us the news we wanted to hear: some individuals armed with guns had broken into the room occupied by Rolando Cancela Veiga, disarmed two policemen guarding him, and then they had all escaped together. This encouraged my friends and I in our endeavours.

On 27 June, a few days after Rolando's escape, Radio Nacional brought us some more news from the prison underworld. Opened in 1982, the famous prison of Puerto de Santa María had its second riot in seven years. They named the leaders as Fernández Varela, Maya Martos, Hidalgo García, Ortiz Jiménez, and Zamoro Durán. They had taken some guards and a doctor, María Casado, as hostages to force negotiations to take place. These prisoners, strongly supported by the rest of the prison population, delivered a recorded message about the discipline in Puerto. They also demanded reform of the Penal Code, that the doctors who provided medical services inside the Spanish prisons not be part of the Administration and be independent of it, the immediate release of all terminal phase AIDS prisoners, and other issues important to all the men and women incarcerated in the Spanish jails. I supported them and their demands. I followed the development of the kidnapping throughout the night on the radio. The tape had been delivered to the Director of the

prison, Eduardo Roca, but he hadn't made it public. Plácido Conde, civil governor of Cádiz, called in the SWAT team and the province was paralysed. There were long-term prisoners in that prison who were hard, dangerous men. If the police intervened there could be a massacre. Inside the prison they made barricades and Molotov cocktails with alcohol stolen from the infirmary. Helicopters hovered above the prison and the SWAT teams took up assault positions. Anything might happen. However, after twenty hours of negotiations the prisoners stood down and released the hostages. The five prisoners who started the riot were transferred right away to the infamous prison of Herrera de la Mancha and given a special regime, guarded by the Guardia Civil. They would pay dearly for daring to confront the system and protesting against its methods.

Luck continued to fight against me, and the news of another transfer surprised me while in full preparation for an escape. I was told to collect my things and leave the prison for La Coruña from where I would leave the next day for the maximum security prison of Daroca in Zaragoza. My dreams of escape were curtailed for the moment but I didn't give up on them. I would try to escape at the first occasion with even the smallest chance of success.

In La Coruña I was sent to the second tier in punishment, where I made contact with José María Expósito, who gave me a couple of saws and a knife. I kept the blade along with bits of saws inside a plastic tube that, once sealed, I put in my rectum. These bits of metals could be turned into the keys to my freedom. I kept my stomach empty of anything else. I felt safer that way.

Daroca Prison, Zaragoza, July 1989

Considered maximum security, Daroca prison was a modern yellowish building. It contained five units; all of its inmates were on a first grade closed regime, and were between twenty-one and twenty-five years old. Daroca was dominated by a central tower that allowed

constant surveillance over the roofs of the five units. On every side of the grounds three policemen guarded the walls from overhead sentry boxes. Nothing could get past them, which was their whole purpose. Assisting them were closed circuit cameras strategically placed all around the compound, and German Shepherds belonging to the Guardia Civil.

I was destined for unit one in the first grade. I met my friend Musta there. We embraced.

“Hey scumbag, did you get my message?” he asked me.

“Yes, your girl gave it to me when she visited.”

As we talked, we walked from one side of the yard to the other.

“Right away I knew it was you involved in that thing at Torres. Like I said, you can count on me for anything; I’m getting out soon, you understand partner?”

“Yes, I know Javi.”

We continued walking and making plans for the future. Time passed there just like in other prisons. Men walked from one side to the other in steps that went nowhere, men brutalized by prison who had been separated from what they most valued and loved. An underworld of friendship, lies, blood, hate, pain, and repression. They had turned prison into a sewer, into a landfill where the righteous and honourable threw those who had committed some wrongs in society. This phenomenon was nothing new to me; I had seen it before in reformatory and juvenile detention. They would catch you as a child and release you as an old man. It was all part of the same deal.

They didn’t go after the delinquent for being anti-social; if they took someone off the streets it was because that person bothered the authorities. Like they did with an older person, thrown out of their house and sent to an asylum or an old folks’ home. This was how society functioned. If we somehow came to believe that this society—that we had robbed from and declared war on—was, in reality more just, humane, and honourable than we had thought, many of us would want to live within it. But in it we saw only egotism,

vanity, competition, and hypocrisy. A tremendously ugly and unjust society had been built that now moulded us all in its image and likeness. We were all partly responsible; nobody could boast of having the high ground. That is why, as we quarrelled and fought among ourselves, the politicians rejoiced in their centres of power, with their completely destructive doctrines, serving their own ambition. The delinquents weren't the real enemies of society, at least not the worst; the real enemies were the politicians and their lies, with their empty promises and their wars. They committed so many injustices against so many of these men in the prison sewer. But who cared?

Several months after my arrival at Daroca, I was told about a plan to escape from the hospital. They informed me first and I was grateful. A prisoner had just come back from the hospital and had sawed most of the way through the bars on the window. Now all that was left to do was to somehow cause the transfer of Anxo and a Madrileño called Julepe. They would follow me in turn.

I prepared some bait for the guards inspired by Rolando's escape. They themselves would give me a ticket out of there. I talked with a trusted companion and he agreed to stab me in the stomach when we went out on the yard. I agreed to it. That same afternoon we met outside.

"Only put it in halfway, ok?" I said to him.

"Ok."

I gave him a knife and we went into one of the corners of the yard where the guard's watchful eyes couldn't reach us. I held onto his shoulder.

"Let's do it," I said, tensing my stomach muscles. I prepared for the drama.

The blade went in smoothly. I hardly felt it. I gave my friend time to leave and hide the knife, and ran out shouting for the guards.

"I've been stabbed, I've been stabbed!"

The rest of the prisoners, who didn't know what was going on,

gathered around me. I feigned serious injury. I was rushed to the infirmary where they took off my clothes and examined the wound.

“He has to go to the hospital,” ordered the doctor.

He had been fooled. I congratulated myself.

The ambulance wasn't long in coming and I was taken to the hospital. Once there they checked me out and performed some tests, and they decided that the stomach lining hadn't been punctured. Nevertheless, they decided to keep me for a few days in case there were complications. They put me in the room for prisoners. I met another prisoner, from Portugal. He explained things to me.

“Look, all this part of the grille is cut. A little more and that's it, we put fifteen days work into it.”

“We're waiting for two friends, we're going to give them a few days to see if they get admitted here, then we'll cut the rest, alright?”

“All right...”

I lay in bed looking at the ceiling. Four uniformed police guarded us outside the armoured door, with its bulletproof glass, which looked into the room. We were on the third floor. I wanted my friends to come so we could leave soon. It was simple. We only had to cut the rest of the bars, make a rope with the sheets and under cover of darkness, get down into the garden that surrounded the hospital. To get out of there would be child's play. This window signified the end of the carceral tunnel for me and for my comrades in escape. I didn't have the slightest doubt that we would succeed, so I entertained myself with the technical details. Where would I go? What would I do? These were the most important questions.

About nine, my friend Anxo succeeded in being admitted and became part of the project. That night we worked a little on the grate. We would cut the rest the following night. If Julepe didn't appear by then we would go without him.

The following morning we received a visit from the doctors.

“You two are well enough to leave,” said one of them, pointing at Anxo and I.

“Listen, I’m still really hurt!” I said.

“I’m sorry, but you, like your companion only had a perforation of the abdominal muscle. Your stomachs are in perfect condition so you don’t need to stay here any longer.”

Hours later we were on our way back to prison. Once more chance had frustrated my hopes of escape. But I would start over again. I wouldn’t give up easily, not just because there were some difficulties. The Portuguese guy tried it himself but he failed. I felt sorry for him and for the opportunity he had lost, since now the hospital would take some measures to reinforce security.

In Daroca there was a lot of regionalism. Galicians exercised the biggest influence in unit one, where the prisoners went out on the yard in groups of ten, for two hours a day. We controlled the cafeteria and the distribution of food, and we had the biggest share of movement, food, tobacco, and coffee. It was the same in unit two with the Madrileños. However there the prisoners went out on the yard for four hours and had televisions in their rooms. In unit three they were allowed out for six hours a day and had access to a sports room and special one-on-one visits. There the main influence was Catalonians. In unit four were Article 10 prisoners and protected prisoners, in different tiers. Unit five was the isolation unit. There were about one hundred fifty of us prisoners there in all. Sometimes fights broke out between us, which could end in someone getting hurt if not killed. But, as a general rule, problems were solved by talking. There existed a certain level of respect, and abuses were looked at badly by the prisoners. There was a certain maturity here not found in juvenile prisons. Nonetheless, regionalism continued to be one of the main sources of problems, so that if two prisoners had a dispute, the rest of their countrymen and friends would get dragged into it. We made a prolonged ugly mistake with this stupid behaviour, not seeing that each of us were simply prisoners, that we only had each other, and that true respect was earned individually, not as part of a group. The Administration

did nothing to avoid it. It didn't facilitate workshops for the prisoners to keep themselves occupied, to earn some money, and have the opportunity to learn a trade. Nor were there cultural programs or facilities for families who travelled hundreds of kilometres to visit the prison. To save a few pennies the management bred dangerous men who would soon be released.

At the end of the year Musta was released. A relative of mine picked him up from Daroca and took him to La Coruña to show him around where he was introduced to some of my other friends. They gave him a gun, as we had arranged, and one of my friends collaborated with him in a bank robbery so he could get some money together for himself.

From the outside I heard news of the escape of my friend Chafi from the court in La Coruña. I put him in contact with Musta and the two of them went to Vigo looking for guns. I started to prepare for my escape, preparations that included Edmundo Balsa Franco, *el Yando*, who I knew from the street. We met through mutual friends. My friends visited several banks in different parts of Galicia, and with the resulting bounty they financed a base in Vigo and Orense. They sent me constant messages and photos of my new home. Everything was ready, I just had to wait to be transferred to La Coruña for one of the many cases I still had with the Coruñan justice system. There they meant to rescue me.

Meanwhile I succeeded in being put in charge of the shop in unit one, which gave me six hours a day on the yard except for the time that I spent serving coffee or attending to the different groups of prisoners out for exercise. Christmas came and we got our hands on some hash, hidden in a food parcel from outside, which I shared with Anxo and some other friends.

Hash was the one drug I still used; the rest I had successfully given up, which gave me some self-confidence. We smoked some

joints to welcome 1990 while our thoughts sketched our one wish: freedom.

But 1990 didn't bring me good news. During the robbery of an American bar, whose loot hardly merited the risk, my friends shot the owner of the bar when he was trying to hide in an office to call the police. Two blasts of a shotgun opened a hole in the wooden door big enough for Musta to end his life with some more gunshots. I remembered his words in my cell: *I will show no mercy*. Resentful, my friends settled accounts with society in this manner.

A month after this event, during Carnaval, a heroin dealer received a visit from three masked men who emptied a twelve gauge into one of his legs. This unnecessary action attracted the attention of the police. They used ordinary methods to solve robberies and other petty crimes, but when it involved firearms and men who weren't afraid to use them, then they got together and really investigated, and this was dangerous. The Antirobbery Brigade of La Coruña, Pontevedra, Orense, and Vigo set to work, and took only thirty days to find the house where the men were hiding in Orense, along with three women. Once the brigade found them, they plotted their plan of attack. They wouldn't be taking any chances.

One morning Musta went out along with another man from the house where they were hiding. They both got confidently into their rental car and headed towards the city centre. At the first traffic lights they got to, a group of police armed to the teeth surrounded the car, pointing guns at them. They surrendered. Half an hour later, Yanko left the building to go to the bus station on his way to his house in La Coruña. A group of detectives was behind him. At the same time another group of detectives kicked in the door of the house where they found Chafi and proceeded to arrest him. That left only one last man to arrest to complete the operation.

Near the bus station the police decided to act and arrest the last man. Several of them took up positions. My friend spotted them and a shoot-out started in the streets of Orense, which ended in his arrest

after he threw himself into a river. The police had caught them all. It left a family destroyed and a bystander dead. They would pay the price of the bad prison management that had brought out the hate and evil in these ex-cons. The beatings, the abuses, and the vicious injustice of a miserable revenge executed in the Spanish prisons on these men, had a lot to do with the creation of these beasts. It is one thing to have to serve a sentence for a crime; another thing altogether is the constant mistreatment with assaults and excessive punishment, a meanness that was the order of the day in prison. This death of the bystander didn't appear any sadder to me than that of the men found at daybreak hanging from a bit of bed sheet, nor of the terrible agony of the terminally-ill AIDS patients, prisoners who die in cold cells, hopeless and far from their loved ones.

I continued on with my job in the commissary. My aggressive character sometimes got me into rows with some of the prisoners but it didn't go any further. My personality brought me lots of small problems like this. I was truly anti-social. In prison you meet all types and sometimes I couldn't avoid feeling hostile towards some of these guys. I didn't consider them my companions. I picked those. They were liars who damaged everything they touched. Some criticised me behind my back, none of them had the guts to do it to my face. They talked shit about me and the following day would offer to shake my hand, smiling in a big show of hypocrisy. Others crawled around whining like servile worms with no personality or pride. The worst spied and snitched to the Administration in exchange for prison benefits. All the units, wings, and yards had their informants. There would always be some seeking liberty at the expense of others. But apart from these elements most of the prisoners that I knew in first grade were solid men, who could be counted on. One of these prisoners was Javier Ávila Navas, or *el Niño*, as he was popularly known. He was transferred from the prison at Alcalá-Meco 1, one of the hardest in Spain. Along with other prisoners he had just carried

out a kidnapping there to free his friend Juan Redondo Fernández from a severe special regime to which he had been subjected . I gave him tobacco, food, and some coffee. With coffees in hand we went for a walk around the yard. I was curious to know what had happened.

“What happened in Meco, Niño?” I asked him, as we walked.

“You want to hear it? It’s a pretty long story...”

“That doesn’t matter, we have plenty of time. Come on, tell me.”

“Well...” he lit a cigarette and started talking.

“On the 29th of December last year they transferred me to the Prison Hospital in Madrid to operate on my dislocated shoulder, which the UEI [Special Police Units] gave me during an assault on Trancho and myself in Ciudad Real during another kidnapping. I was in hospital between January and February. I met my friend Redondo there. He was bad, I had never seen him like that. He literally looked destroyed, a wreck. He was all skin and bones and couldn’t put two words together. I helped him wash and talked to him.”

“Why was he like that?” I asked curiously.

“They had put him in isolation, in Alcalá-Meco, and you know what that’s like. It made me want to cry to see him in this state. They had taught him a lesson in cruelty. I asked him to tell me everything that had happened. He couldn’t eat since they spat in his food and sprayed it with pepper-spray. He had been totally isolated from the other prisoners and they had even tried to infect him with AIDS using a dirty syringe... at least they had threatened him with that.”

“Fuck, why did he let it go on?”

He lit a cigarette, and then one for me and we continued walking circles around the yard.

“What was he going to do? Unit seven in Meco is all automatic and you can’t contact the guards for anything, except when they came in to hit you and when that happens they come in a gang. He couldn’t do a thing.”

“Right...”

“He told the prisoners that he knew in the other units, so at least they knew about his situation. But they did nothing except complain about it, and that changes nothing. You know they wipe their asses with complaints. The truth is that they were all intimidated and didn’t dare to act. They feared the reprisals of the guards, which is normal. That was how it was when I arrived at Meco.” He paused for a moment, as if to organize the unforgettable memories in his mind, then continued. “I had to save my friend from this at any price and talked with Conde and Losa—you know them?”

“Only by name.”

“Well I talked to them and asked them to help in a kidnapping to save Juanito from unit seven. They agreed. So on Valentine’s Day we acted.” He paused again and continued. “That morning Losa and Conde went down to the sentry box at my request, to ask for a cloth to clean the food cart. There was no problem since they were in charge of distributing the meals and they didn’t arouse suspicion. When the guards opened up, they took them and brought them to the showers where I was waiting with another guard I had captured.”

“Which unit were you in?” I asked, interrupting.

“In unit three.”

“All right, go on.”

“We waited for the medical staff to come and we stopped them. There were two women, a doctor, and a nurse. We told them that they had nothing to fear if they did what we said. I felt a bit weird keeping those girls there, but they were a guarantee that we wouldn’t be attacked,” he explained to me. “I ran to release the rest of the prisoners and told them to cover all the windows with newspapers and mattresses. The guards there had realised what was going on and had turned the power off. They asked us to release the hostages. We told them no, that we would only release them in exchange for the release of my friend from unit seven and of Zanco Durán, Ortiz Jiménez, Maya Martos, and the other prisoners incarcerated in the special regime of Herrera de La Mancha and that they guarantee the

transfer of the other prisoners. We also delivered a list of demands that included, among other things, the end of mistreatment in Spanish prisons and the release of terminally-ill prisoners.”

“That was really good. We need more of that.”

“Finally they brought in an inspector from the General Directors and Jiménez de Parga to negotiate.”

“Who is he?”

“An idiot, the secretary of the ombudsman. I read them the list of grievances and the rest is history, you’ve heard it...”

“Yes, but what happened at the end?”

“We succeeded in getting this out on Radio Nacional and they released Juanito from unit seven, which isn’t too bad, don’t you think?”

“It was a beautiful gesture,” I pronounced.

“Yes, it was.”

It was very difficult to find true friendship in prison but when it showed itself it could be enormously deep and go to whatever ends may come. Stories like this amazed me. Jail didn’t just house scumbags. Here were also true men, men of their word, honourable men with principles, millionaires of dignity, pride, and rebellion. But as a general rule, what reigned among the prisoners was camaraderie, not friendship, which was reserved solely for those hearts capable of great love.

The arrest of those who could have helped me escape from jail didn’t deter me. I resolved to escape while I was still strong and healthy. I was given a court date in La Coruña for the month of September. I would try something there and meanwhile I would get myself in shape.

In March they moved me to unit two for good behaviour. There I met up again with my friend Bolas. Around this time ETA killed a prison officer from Basauri in Bilbao; he was shot in the head as

a reprisal for the mistreatment that some of the political prisoners received in prison. The guards, mostly members of the CESIF union, decided to have a strike that would affect all the prisons. There would be chaos. We would be trapped in the middle, given that the action of the guards in exercising their right to strike would leave us without exercise, showers, communication, etc. Two days later the guards went on strike. In Daroca what happened was coming for a long time: violence.

My friend Bolas came to see me

“José, we’re going onto the roof. Are you coming?”

“Now?” I asked, surprised.

“Of course, the strike started this morning and now we can’t get into the yard.”

“Who else is up for it?”

“Everyone here in the yard.”

“Then let’s go, but you’ll have to come up and open the cells.”

The rest of the prisoners joined in without exception and the riot started. One by one the prisoners in the yard were climbing onto the roof right in front of the humiliated guards and the police in the barracks. The units, divided into two tiers, had skylights in the roof that allowed natural light into the corridors. A group of companions armed with knives and bars managed to break one of them and got into the unit. They pulled iron bars from the roof and broke down the cell doors inside with them. Once freed we went to support the other prisoners, going in groups in to units one, three and four, where we freed the rest of the companions who wanted to join in the revolt, among them were Ávila Navas and Juan José Garfía Rodríguez. An hour later the prison of Daroca was a sad sight to behold. The electrical lines had been destroyed, the bulbs broken, smashed to pieces. The cells had practically been destroyed as well as the solar tiles, the commissary, the workshops, etc. Seventy prisoners ran from one unit to another armed with knives and bars, police armed with clubs and rifles waited for the right moment to

intervene. It was a chaotic scene that—along with the plumes of smoke that came from the mattresses burning on different parts of the roof—created an apocalyptic image.

The news reached all the prisons through the media, Nanclares de Oca, Cáceres 2, Alcalá-Meco, and Foncalent were with us. The Administration would have to use the security forces of the State to stop this upheaval.

Armed with hundreds of live rounds and rubber bullets, the Guardia Civil started the assault. They appeared in force, firing at anything that moved, forcing us to retreat. Some of us went back down to the units, others got higher up on the roof where we had a better position. From there, shielded from the rubber bullets and the smoke bombs with mattresses over our heads like a parapet, we responded by throwing missiles. However, the bombardment they sent at us had us constantly lying face down on the roof. There was a moment of panic when it seemed to give way. We had to be very careful and not move too much, a big movement could collapse the fragile asbestos tile roof on which we were defending ourselves. This was all happening when I heard Bolas calling me.

“José, José!”

I lifted my head and looked towards him. He was lying on the roof, and his face was grimacing in pain and I thought he’d been hit with a rubber bullet. I got up quickly and ran over the other prisoners to try and reach him. A smoke canister whistled over my head.

“What happened?”

“A rubber bullet, I can’t breathe.”

“Does it hurt a lot?”

“Yes.”

I assessed the situation. This fight was lost, and it was just a matter of time before we surrendered. I raised my arms and shouted.

“Don’t shoot, don’t shoot!”

The police stayed still. The sergeant commanding them ordered them to stop firing and shouted to me.

“What do you want?”

“I have an injured companion and he’s choking. I want to get him down so he can see a doctor. I think his ribs are broken.”

“OK, but then you all get down, all right?” he said, trying to coerce me.

I talked to the others, and we accepted the riot had come to an end. We agreed that I would be the first to go down and see what would happen.

“It’s fine, we surrender.” I yelled, “but you have to guarantee you won’t beat anyone.”

“You have my word, young man.”

I took my friend and carried him on my shoulder to the edge of the roof. Once there I got down myself and with the help of other prisoners, Bolas got down. The group of police pointed guns at us. I was scared shitless.

“All right, the rest of the prisoners come down now!” cried the sergeant.

All the rest started to get down. It was over.

Happily Jironés wasn’t seriously injured apart from a huge bruise on his chest from the impact of the rubber bullet. They put the group of us in unit five. The other group of prisoners had already been taken and jailed. We were the last ones. Although the cops kept their word, the guards for the most part took their anger out on the prisoners, most of whom they beat. For the moment I had been saved from the beatings but I knew that sooner or later they would come to visit me. Without fail, it was a methodical system.

Once they had regained control of the prison, the singling out of prisoners responsible for the riot started. Eventually they narrowed it down to just fifteen prisoners in unit five, among whom were Ávila Navaras, Jironés, Julepe, Anxo, and I, and the other companions in the revolt. However they only ordered the transfer of Niño and Julepe to the jail in Herrera de La Mancha; they unjustly held them responsible for the riot. Once more the Administration punished

arbitrarily, using any excuse to take revenge on prisoners who had proved to be troublesome.

The Guardia Civil took charge of the jail for the duration of the strike. They came to serve us food with rifles loaded with rubber bullets, shields, and clubs, ready to beat us at the slightest wrong move. In the first few days they wouldn't let anybody onto the yard for anything, they didn't give us sheets or blankets, or let us have showers. Finally it went back to normal and we could get our belongings, go to the yard, and take showers. Long days in isolation awaited us.

One night some guards came to see me, armed with clubs. They opened the door.

"Tarrío, strip and come out into the corridor so we can search you."

After stripping I went out to the corridor and put my hands against the wall. They wielded truncheons in their hands.

"Spread your legs!" ordered the one we nicknamed *the Gypsy*.

I obeyed.

"Further, come on."

I obeyed again. Then they started to hit me with their clubs, one caught me in the balls. I resisted the rain of blows as best I could. When they left me I went back into the cell. This scene repeated itself during those days in different searches performed on other companions. It formed part of the rules of the game, a game of dice with power, lost before they were thrown. In jail the prisoner is less than a cockroach, he is just a number, a body. They could do with him whatever they wanted. Who could see it? Who would record it? How could you prove that a prisoner had been mistreated? And if you could, who would care? The Vigilance Committee was composed for the most part of members of the Administration, and there existed an obvious connivance between the judges and the prison system, which was obvious from the hundreds of failed or archived complaints from prisoners.

On the 30th, some good news caused uproar in the unit. A few hours after being taken by the Guardia Civil to be transferred to Herrera de La Mancha, Javier Ávila Navas managed his second escape from a transport van by cutting a hole in the floor of the van with a saw. We greeted the news with celebration and applause. He had gotten lucky!

In the month of May we ended our punishment terms and we left isolation. We went to unit one where our companions greeted us with uproar. We started to go out again in groups and so the normal pace of the prison resumed. I made friends with Izquierdo Trancho, a delinquent from León who possessed excellent human qualities as a companion. We often walked together. Like myself he was an escapist, so we spoke the same language. We decided to confess to some robberies we had done on the outside so we would both be taken to court and we could try something together. Anything was worth a shot.

I organized several protests in which the majority of the prisoners in unit one backed me up. We stopped cleaning the unit and distributing the food. We declared a total strike. The Director came to see me, accompanied by a Head Warden and several guards.

“Tarrío, gather your things, you’re going back to isolation,” he told me.

“Me?” I asked him, pretending not to understand, “but I didn’t do anything,” I added sarcastically.

“You never do anything! Come on, let’s go...”

I put my belongings in some bags and went out into the corridor of the tier towards unit five. Prisoners called to me though the doors of their cells.

“Che, where are you going?”

“Isolation, send a message to Trancho, ok?”

Insults directed at the guards came from behind the doors.

“Bastards! Pigs! Sons of bitches!”

We were still very united by the recent events. There was a great

feeling of camaraderie.

Once in unit five I was assigned a cell. The Director addressed me in an authoritarian tone.

“You’re going to stay here and have a grade one regime. You’ll have the same rights you have at the moment, but you will go out on the yard alone and will remain isolated from the rest of the inmates until you learn to conduct yourself in a civilised manner and not act like a savage.”

“Do what you want but I doubt you’ll change anything in me.”

“We’ll see about that, Tarrío.”

After they closed the gate and door of the cell I took several books from the bags, along with towels, sheets, blankets and a radio, and made the bed. Soon I lay down, lit a cigarette and started to read *King Lear* by Shakespeare, which captivated me. I had spent three years in jail with constant isolation and I had lost all fear of this kind of punishment and the others that the Directors tried to use to threaten me and tame me on a daily basis. Prison didn’t scare me. I had my projects and I just bided my time and waited for them to mature. The punishments couldn’t make me give up on them.

After a couple of weeks I was let out of there and taken back to unit one where all was calm. I started up a friendship with Juan José Garfía Rodríguez, a well-known bandit from Valladolid and thanks to him I succeeded in getting my old job back at the commissary, which the two of us now managed together. We spent all day talking about escapes and playing chess, as well as exercising in the gym that they had finally installed in the unit. For convenience’s sake I was on good behaviour. Juanjo told me his story. He had been arrested in Valladolid after a shoot-out in which two cops died and one was wounded. His brother Carlos had also been injured. Faced with a one hundred twelve-year sentence, his only hope was escape. On one occasion he had escaped from the court of Las Palmas but he had been spotted entering a building and arrested again a few hours later. Now he awaited his opportunity. An opportunity he took a year later

that would make him public enemy number one in Spain.

In the month of August, I was visited by my mother and my brothers. They had travelled over fifteen hundred km to come see me, and these pigs only allowed us to talk for half an hour through a dirty plastic screen. It deeply angered me.

“Hello son” greeted the unquestionable queen of my heart.

“Hello mother, how are you?”

“Good, a bit tired from all the travelling, but good anyway. Look, this is your brother Marcos!” She told me, putting him up on a chair.

I waved at him and he smiled at me shyly. It was the first time I had seen my little brother. A wave of emotion overcame me but I choked it back. I played with this little boy through the glass.

“Son, what’s going on? The Director came to talk to me and he said you are causing a lot of problems.”

“Don’t pay any attention to him mother, he’s a worm. A man who won’t let us hug after so many years and only allows us a half hour for a visit despite how far you’ve travelled isn’t in the best position to lecture me in good behaviour.”

“Ok, it doesn’t matter. How are you doing?”

“Good.”

“I don’t know, you seem a bit agitated.”

“It’s because I hate that bastard.”

We continued talking. I greeted my brothers and Antonio, my mother’s husband and a friend of mine. A real gent. They had come to see me and afterwards they would go to Galicia for a family holiday. The allotted thirty minutes ended and we saw each other off with smiles that tried to hide the sadness that the situation produced in us. This pain in my mother’s heart would be my real punishment and not the prison. I said nothing to her about my illness.

In September I would be transferred to La Coruña. This move gave me a chance of escape. I intended to use the knowledge I had about the prison to escape. The hard march to freedom had begun.

Part 2: The Path of Freedom

When all the prisons in the world have released all of their prisoners because they have no more reason to lock people up in the name of the law...

La Coruña Prison, September 1990

Around 3:30 in the afternoon the Guardia Civil prison van stopped in front of the La Coruña prison. I was tired and dizzy from the journey. I wanted to get out of this cage and breathe some fresh air. We left the van in handcuffs, and in pairs, and collected our bedding from the baggage compartment. Then, still in the custody of the Guardia Civil, we were taken inside the prison. Once inside the walls of the old jail we were uncuffed. They set me aside from the other prisoners and after subjecting me to a cavity search I was taken to the isolation unit on the third floor, which had been nicknamed “The Bunker”. I set off with a friendly wave to those who had been my travelling companions.

The isolation unit, recently constructed beside unit three (opposite the visiting rooms, the infirmary, and the women’s prison) was the most secure part of the prison, being the most inaccessible zone to climb out of. This time they wouldn’t make it easy for me. I was assigned one of the six cells that made up the unit. Once alone I fell down on the mattress and slept, exhausted.

I woke up a few hours later when they opened my cell to give me my bags of clothes.

“Tarrío,” said one of the guards to me, “you have two hours on the yard. I left the showers open if you want to have one.”

“I need to go to the shop and get some coffee,” I told him.

“All right, the guy from the shop will come get your list.”

I put on a robe and after gathering some clean clothes, soap, and a towel I went towards the yard where the showers were. The windows of the cells were only a metre off the ground. There was a man sitting in one of them. I approached his window and called to

him, knocking on the glass at the same time.

"Hello," I greeted him, "who are you?"

"My name's Javier. Can you give me a smoke?"

"I don't have any now but I'll go to the shop afterwards and get you some. I'm going to have a shower, I'll talk to you later."

After a good shower I went to the yard where I met him walking around. I joined him and introduced myself.

"My name is José, but here I'm better known as Che."

"Yes, I've heard of you."

"What are you in for?" I asked him.

"Someone dropped some drugs in the yard and I jumped in after it."

"What about the cops?" I asked.

"They're not there, the barracks has been under construction for a few days now."

Fucking hell! I thought. "Tell me why do you walk like that, all bent over?"

"It's because every two weeks they give me a Largactyl injection and then leave me lying there. I'm getting over it now though."

He had an empty stare. In his eyes was a glimmer of madness, of some progressive deterioration that had seriously damaged his personality. They had changed him into the remains of a human through injections and continuous sessions of isolation. This man needed help and companionship, not punishment and solitude. In spite of my reserved, unsociable, and often indifferent character, I was interested in his situation.

"Don't take any more injections," I told him.

"Yeah?" he answered, looking me in the eyes. "Once I tried to refuse and they forced it on me after they gave me a beating."

"I don't know Javier, but if they keep doing this you'll end up in a psychiatric hospital."

"I know..."

We continued walking in the yard every day. I got him used

to exercising with me, challenging him to games of handball. After we showered we would walk together, drinking coffee that we got from the shop. My company helped him, and his brain was starting to function normally. He got better, demonstrating more clarity in the conversations we had every day.

A few days after my arrival in La Coruña I received a visit from my uncle Suso. We talked by phone.

“Hi Che, how are you?”

“Good, how’s Chico?”

“I saw him yesterday. He gave me this note for you,” he answered, taking out a piece of paper from his wallet, which he held up to the glass so I could read it.

Dear friend: I have had serious problems with the police and they're looking for me in connection with several robberies. I have to leave La Coruña for a while. I'm taking guns with me because I'm going to need them. I got your message and it will have to wait a while. Right now I'm alone and have too many problems. As soon as I have some reliable people who can help me out of this we're going to come looking for you. Have faith and be strong. We will succeed.

After I read this I felt a bit abandoned. But I realized that his way of thinking was different and that without doubt he still cared for me a lot. He lacked the disorganisation that I was usually guilty of and did not rush into anything if he wasn't sure he would reach his objective. He calculated the risks. I couldn't fault that. I didn't demand that he risk his life or freedom for me, although I would do it for him. He was my friend above all, despite my egotism, and that was what counted. I wished him luck and gave him some instructions to get in touch as soon as possible.

“Well, uncle. I hope that you're all well at home. In any case give the message to Chico and tell him to take care of himself.”

“We're ok. Take care of yourself José, don't let anything happen to you.”

“No worries.”

Back in the cell I lay thinking about the new developments. Once he got organised Chico would come to get me, I was sure of this. Bits of my past came to mind. I recalled the two occasions on which I had broken him out of the correctional schools in both Cáceres and Logroño; the hundreds of kilometres we had wandered together in the constant flight in which we spent our lives, to return to the streets of La Coruña.

Or when we worked with his brother Yves, Rolando, Julio el *Carroña*, José María Expósito, and others in the digging of a tunnel in the Juvenile Wing of a prison, years ago. One night we crawled three hundred metres cross country to the walls of the prison yard, where we threw over two packages containing a chisel, a tape measure, a hammer head and a pick. If we were discovered it would have been hard to convince the guards we were not prisoners trying to escape, and get shot for putting a foot wrong. Nevertheless, all went well, the packages landed in the yard, where they were recovered by a prisoner who had sawn through a bar in his window, hiding them. Even though the tunnel was finally discovered a few metres from its completion, it was worth it. It was beautiful to help an imprisoned man to escape. That, or escaping oneself, were the best experiences that a libertarian man could have. It wasn't right to leave a friend to rot in a dungeon, subdued and forced into a miserable existence.

I finally decided to act for myself and try for the barracks from the third floor, which according to Javier's information was under construction. I didn't want to miss this opportunity nor passively wait for someone else to solve my problems for me. I would take the initiative. I sent messages to the women, to the minors, and to the rest of the wings so that they would be my eyes, and they informed me about the four sentry boxes in the complex. I had friends who would help me without any problem. Through the windows of the third floor, which overlooked the yard where I went for a walk every afternoon, they managed to get several sets of sheets and some

paint that was the colour of the bars. I was also given some 5,000 peseta bills, which would serve me well for my first few expenses if I managed to escape. I stored them in my rectum along with a pair of saws and got rid of my knife blade. Prison was a harsh jungle, and only by getting rid of prejudices and hang-ups could you survive without greater damage.

My pride resided in my capacity to swallow it and to get out of there. Obviously it would not be easy; it would require sacrifices, time, and ingenuity. And luck... lots of luck.

One morning, there were problems with my companion Javier. Several guards, accompanied by the doctor, came to give him an injection and, as we had decided, he refused to take it. They threatened to give it to him by force and I intervened.

"What's happening, Javier?" I asked him approaching the sentry box in the yard, where he was arguing with the doctor.

"They want to give me an injection and I don't want it..."

"Listen," I said to the doctor, "this kid is alright. He's been exercising with me all week and he doesn't need shit like this..."

"Don't interfere, Tarrío. I am the doctor here and I decide if he needs an injection or not."

The ease with which this bastard with the title of psychiatric doctor decided the health and the life of my companion made me angry. It was unacceptable.

"Listen, you slug," I warned him through the window, "if you come into the unit we will kill you, and this goes for you too," I added, directing it towards the guards.

They didn't come inside, but went to get the Head Warden who came to the unit to talk to us.

"Tarrío," he said to me, "are you starting trouble again?"

"Listen, neither I nor my companion did anything until they threatened him with forced injections," I told him, pointing at the doctor and the guards.

“Let’s see: Javier, do you want this injection or not?” I asked him.
“No, I am fine the way I am.”

After this confirmation the Head Warden talked with the doctor and they finally decided to substitute the injections with tranquilizer pills. We had made a big step in his recovery.

The following day while we walked on the yard some notes wrapped around batteries all fell at once from the yard of the women’s section, which we were separated from by just one wall. One of the guards asked for them.

“Tarrío, bring that over here.”

I approached his box and opened them up in front of him, showing him the written sheets from a distance.

“See, there’s no drugs or anything prohibited inside. As far as the messages, they are private.”

“Hand over the notes,” he insisted.

The Head Warden came to see me again the following morning when I was in my cell. He ordered his companions to leave, and they left us alone. He was called Alberto and we had known each other for a long time.

“No change, eh, Tarrío?”

“No change with any of you either, as I see it.”

“What happened yesterday with the official?”

I lit a cigarette and answered.

“Nothing serious. There was girl who wrote to me and since I can’t communicate with her now we write each other notes. What’s wrong with that?”

“It’s prohibited,” he told me, taking out a cigarette from a box.
“Can I have a light?”

I gave him a light, answering him:

“Listen I’m going to be straight with you. It’s a long time since I’ve been in Galicia and locked up in these cells. I came here to see my family and friends, to calm down a bit, nothing else,” I lied to him. “So just leave me in peace. If you don’t like the note thing, then

let us see each other and that'll be that."

"Who is the girl?"

"A friend of mine."

"I'm going to talk to the director so that he'll let you see each other, but I don't want you throwing any more notes over the wall or disrespecting the officials again. Understand?"

"I would be grateful for that..."

That afternoon after lunch, the director sent for me. After being searched I was taken to his office.

"So, what is it that you want?" he asked me.

"To be able to visit and to be left in peace."

"With who?"

"Trinidad Silva Iglesias."

He thought about it for a moment.

"I'll let you two talk on the phone in the visiting room for twenty minutes. If you don't do anything until the day before your transfer, you can have a one-on-one visit with her for a few hours. Not before then."

He was trying to coerce me into good behaviour through emotional blackmail and manipulation. Psychology for children.

"Sounds good," I answered.

That afternoon I talked with the girl for twenty minutes just as I had been promised. She was as beautiful as the times we had been together, maybe more so because of the inactivity of the jail. I ached when I saw her as a prisoner through those bars.

"Hi, trouble! How are you?"

"You know, bound in chains but lively as ever."

"I was surprised they let us talk. I was hoping it would be one-on-one..."

On the other side of the glass, a female guard was listening in to our conversation. On my side, close by a male guard was doing the same. How many private moments had been invaded by his insulting presence? How could he be so mean and shameless, so

lacking in respect, staying there without moving back. Undoubtedly this had ended up forming part of the spirit of the jailer, honed with time and practice.

“Tarrío finish up, your time is over...”

“Ok, *China*, take care and good luck. Say hi to Pili.”

“Take care yourself.”

A kiss on the glass was the cold farewell. How many lips of men and women had been pressed against this dirty glass, messages of affection or love? This system of visiting was artificial and degrading, it was cruel. How could it be bad for two friends to kiss? Where was the harm in allowing those citizens who had relatives in prison to touch, hug, or kiss them? The Administration had enough means to change these cubicles, dirty and full of bars, into small rooms where the prisoners, their relatives, and friends could experience human contact, guaranteeing them weekly face-to-face visits. At least the relatives of the prisoners, as citizens who paid their taxes, deserved better, more dignified, more humane treatment.

The preparations began. No one had ever succeeded in scaling these walls. A prisoner had tried it once, but upon getting onto the roof the tiles broke loose, throwing him into the void. He broke some bones, but miraculously managed to survive the impact. From the yard to the roof it was some thirty metres. I was in good shape from lifting weights in Daroca, and I had spotted a place where I thought I could climb up quickly, using my good conditioning. It went to the Women's Section. They had built up the wall of the yard so that the men on the third tier couldn't see them through the upper windows. Now the wall was only a couple of metres from the roof. The insane anxiety of the authorities to curb relations between the male and female prisoners had made them build this wall, which would get me onto the roof. I appreciated their help.

That night I started to saw through one of the window bars of the cell I occupied, while my comrade Javier kept watch out the windows in front, where the infirmary was. The help of the

other prisoners was always invaluable. In two nights I cut through it. In spite of the daily searches to which we were subjected, they didn't notice the sawn part, thanks to the paint my companions had provided. My thanks to them!

I had thought of having the face-to-face visit and leaving that night. But I didn't trust the Director. I knew their methods and thought that after the visit they would move me to another cell or that the construction work would be finished. Freedom was the indisputable priority for which I had to set aside all sentimentality. It occurred to me that maybe I wouldn't ever see her again...

The night of 15 September fell over the Coruña jail, accomplice and seducer to the escapist. I waited until four to give the prisoners time to get to sleep, and the guards time to get bored. At this time, it would be cold and that would persuade them to stay inside their sentry boxes.

When the appointed time arrived I made a rope from the sheets. Once finished I wet it down to give it more resistance, hoping it would hold up. I dressed in a black tracksuit and ski mask, which would help me spy from the roof without being easily spotted from far away. Then I coiled the rope around my waist and torso. At four on the dot I pulled out the bar and went outside. From that moment I had regained my physical freedom, withheld from me by my imprisonment; and I was free until the moment when they would return me once again to one of these dungeons. I approached Javier's window, and after a firm handshake, gave him some photos of my family and an address where to send them.

After these details were dealt with I undertook the climb. I went up to the window of the sentry box and from there to the small roof that covered it. Once I was past that, I clambered from the wall of the visiting room towards the roof of a small workshop located below the infirmary. Next I got up on one of the windows by way of a pipe connected to the wall and from there up onto the next level by the same procedure. I thought only about getting up, avoiding

even the idea of a fall. Once at the third floor window I grasped the bars, resting a bit to regain my strength, confident that no one would open the window at that moment and find me crouching there. I climbed one more metre on the pipe and reached the top of the wall and hung there, took another rest straddling the pipe, then got on top, with one foot in front of the other as the wall was only as wide as the bricks it was made of. From this position the edge of the roof reached my chest. I didn't make the error of the prisoner who had tried to get over these walls before me, and I moved the tiles to the side while putting my hands on a firm base to lean on. My hands touched concrete looking for a suitable place to heave up from. The sloped roof made me conscious that if I didn't succeed the first time, I would be going down, given the narrowness of the wall I was on. I relaxed by breathing through my nose and took in the air to try and concentrate all my efforts on getting up. I went for it, pushing my chest and stomach above the roof. For a moment a horrible fear overcame me, but I managed to forget it and in a new push, helped by my elbows, I successfully got up. Phew! From below my companion had followed the whole climb and waved with his hand. I returned the wave.

Once on top of the roof of the Women's Section I headed towards the Juvenile Wing over the roofs and from there to the third tier. I dropped onto the roof of the workshop, and I was placed overlooking the front entrance and the barracks, verifying that it was still under construction and empty. I threw the mask into the yard, since now that I had crossed the roof, I no longer needed it. I took the rope from my waist and waited for the shift change of the guards to act. Meanwhile I smoked a cigarette, contemplating the city. My mind filled with memories.

At five o'clock the guard changed and I gave them some time to get bored and settle in while I prepared the rope to descend onto the ground without a noise. I ran it around one of the projections holding up the wire fencing that I would have to get over, in order

to descend. I didn't tie it, but put it through the projection as you would thread a needle, doubling the rope. This method would allow me to recover it once I'd reached the ground with just a pull. I let it fall into the compound and, half an hour later, climbing over the wire, I descended the double rope to the ground without being seen. I retrieved the rope by pulling it and crossed the compound, keeping my back to the walls beneath the unoccupied barracks. One of the ends of the rope had a weight made of some big batteries, which I planned to throw around the metal rail so I could climb with the rope doubled up, as I had descended. In the sentry box in front in the other corner, a cop was scanning the area. At his side, leaning against the wall, rested his submachine gun. To my left, his companion walked around without noticing my presence, distracted by the music that came from the radio he had on for entertainment. I tied the rope around the railing and holding both parts, started to climb it artfully. However, almost within reach of the metal railing, the rope slipped and one of the knots broke, sending me down with a crash. Although I fell on my feet, avoiding injury, the Guardia Civil noticed me and sounded the alarm.

"Hey, you son of a bitch!" he shouted at me from the box, "don't make a move..."

From the other side the cop called his companions from the guard post. I had lost again. Soon several armed cops came to the yard and approached me.

"Get on the ground, face down with your hands behind your back," said one of them.

I obeyed him.

Then he warned me again:

"Don't try anything stupid," and giving his companion his gun, he added: "If he tries something shoot him."

He then approached me and handcuffed me. Once I had gotten up with his help, they took me towards the main police station. I felt tired and defeated. My gaze was fixed on the concrete floor, clearly

showing my sense of failure.

Once at the police station they took me inside, leading me to a small room where they told me to sit on a chair. One of them questioned me.

“Were you out of your cell for long?”

“No,” I lied to him.

“Were you alone?”

“Yes.”

He looked at me sternly and asked me my name. I told him.

“I am José Tarrío González.”

From the yard, through the doors, I listened to the guards talking to the cops. They wanted to bring me straight back to the prison, to which the Guardia Civil was opposed. They had to take a statement from me in front of a lawyer. We were in a democratic state and there were procedures to be followed... or at least so it seemed.

Around ten in the morning they moved me back inside the prison. I was escorted by several cops with my hands cuffed behind my back. A pretty female guard observed the situation with curiosity from the prison entrance. She was in charge of checking the documents of relatives who came to visit their loved ones imprisoned in this absurd universe of evil. I smiled at her openly, teasing. It was the only thing that occurred to me to do.

Inside a group of guards, led by the Head Warden on duty, awaited my entrance. They opened up the bars and took me back, to my surprise in a friendly and correct manner.

“Well, Tarrío, you lost, so let’s have no more escapes and get you what you get here, peace. We’re going to grant you some of your belongings and the rest will be taken away. You know it all already.” The Head Warden looked at me and added: “I have orders that you are not to be allowed out on the yard so you’ll stay in your cell twenty-four hours a day.”

“Not my cell; one of yours...” I answered him, clarifying a detail that was fundamental to me.

It was not my cell; it was a cell of the State and Society, in which my freedom and my rights were taken from me against my will.

“Well, Tarrío, let’s leave it there alright?”

“Suits me...”

The truth was that my intentions were very different to their plans. I had seen that the door of the Women’s Department was unguarded and left open. This one led to the yard in front of the guard’s station and the visiting room, so that if I could make it there I could try to leave the prison along with the prisoners’ relatives who would not turn me in. I was thinking about this while I was again taken to the Bunker, which had been emptied, leaving me alone. They let me take some blankets, a radio, and a few books to the cell to which I had been assigned.

Once again I was isolated, in my usual environment. I fell on top of the mattress staring at the white ceiling as thoughts raced through my head. Above me was the tier of the older prisoners, so I could get things through the windows with the help of strings. I needed a knife. Nothing more. With it I could seize a guard from the unit, or maybe several of them, since it was unusual for them to open the cell with just one of them, but this wasn’t a big problem.

Faced with a knife, with extreme violence, the thugs of the State would stop being so thuggish, and become very humble and human. No, they weren’t a problem. With them captured and tied up in their cells, I would make a rope with the sheets and get down into the women’s yard, capturing the guards there, one or two at most, and lock them up with the rest of the prisoners, just in case someone did something strange or accused the others of collaborating. This would avoid problems for everyone. I would seize the keys and leave with people from the visiting room, since it would be morning, when there were visitors leaving every thirty minutes. If there were problems in the yard, the pretty guard at the entrance would be my hostage. Hadn’t they acted ruthlessly with me? Wasn’t I myself a hostage of the Administration? I never accepted confinement and

my attitude would always be at odds with theirs. The plan was good; I liked it. I decided to start organising for it right away.

Two days later I asked for a knife from the tier above. That afternoon it was sent to me. They threw it down into the yard, covered in a jacket, from one of the windows. I had to just get it back up with a hook attached to a long string, hooking onto it and pulling it up to my window. I was doing this when the door to the yard opened and at the same time a gang of guards came into the cell. One group grabbed the jacket and the knife. They cuffed me.

“This time you’ve gone too far, Tarrío,” threatened the head guard.

“Why? What’s happened?” I asked uselessly.

“Stop trying to be clever, Tarrío. You were thrown a knife from the gallery which we saw you trying to retrieve, and since you are alone in the unit, it is obvious who you want to use it against,” explained one of them to me with a reasoning that surprised me in a guy like him.

They took me to the juvenile isolation, putting me in a cell, number four, in front of one of the Guardia Civil boxes. There they cuffed my hands to the bed, immobilizing me.

“You’re going to stay here until you leave this place...”

To transfer me here they had emptied the unit of all the other prisoners. They loved to leave me on my own as the truth was that I exercised a big influence on the rest of the prisoners and they didn’t want me to have any contact at all with them. I settled in for the night. This position caused a lot of pain in my arms, but I told myself it would be a lesson to do things better next time. It was all part of the game. I didn’t sleep the whole night. There were a lot of things going through my head at times like this.

The next day I was taken to the La Coruña courthouse to be tried for breaking some bail conditions. During the trial I commented to the judge on my current situation in jail but she ignored me, striking my complaints from the record. I got angry:

“You bitch! Is this what you think justice is? You happily send men to prison in the name of justice and then you hush up the tortures and irregularities that happen there, prostituting yourself at the whims of the Administration. And you think you can judge me? You must be a frigid woman with an inferiority complex that seriously affects the tiny brain you must have...”

My words caused a commotion in the room. The judge went red in the face. Accustomed to the vile submission of the delinquents who passed through her court to be judged, my outburst had humiliated her and seriously offended her.

“Take him out of the courtroom,” she managed to say, containing her anger, “and know” she added in my direction, “that I will open a contempt of court file on you.”

“Lady,” I answered from the door, “I wipe my ass on your sentences, believe me.”

The police removed me from the room, taking me down one of the lifts to the cells in the basement.

“You have a bad temper, eh, Tarrío?” one of them said to me.

“No, it’s just that I hate those bastards. I can’t stand them.”

I continued talking to him, to create a friendly atmosphere, since I meant to escape when they took me to the van. Exactly. We went outside where the van was parked. A policeman took me, holding onto the handcuffs that kept my hands behind my back while the others moved forward a few metres. I went for it. Approaching one of the columns of the building, I pushed off with my feet, shoving myself violently backwards and knocking down the policeman, who nevertheless held on to the chain of the cuffs by one hand. He screamed and I gave him several kicks of my heel to his face while I dragged him without success. The rest of the police rushed on me with their guns and tackled me, dragging me into the van.

“When we get to the prison you’ll get what’s coming to you,” they threatened me.

Once at the jail they took me from the van by force. One of

them grabbed my hair, pulling my head up towards the sky, the rest grabbed my arms. When we passed the entrance I gave a big forced smile to the pretty jailer who once more stared at me amazed. She asked one of the cops curiously:

“What happened?”

“He tried to escape and injured one of our guys. He’s a real bastard.”

We went inside the domain of the prison. I waited for a reprisal beating which was normal in cases like this, but instead the policeman I had attacked behaved like a real man.

“So? Don’t you see what you’ve done?”

“It’s nothing personal, I was just trying to escape...”

“Well it turned out badly for you,” he answered, calming down, “but at least you have balls. How old are you?”

“Twenty-two.”

“Get him out of the chains,” he ordered his companion and then he added to me: “I hope the next time you have better luck, but not with me.” He smiled.

“Thanks, you’re a good man...”

I would never forget the face of this man, who in recognising my right to escape showed his own worth as a human being. This honoured him as an enemy. He didn’t abuse a defenceless man, though his companions had urged him to do it.

The Head Warden came to fetch me along with his gang of guards. After handcuffing me they took me back to the cell I had left that morning. Once again they cuffed me to the bed.

“Do you want to eat?” one of them asked.

“Yes, and I also want a pen and paper to write to the Penal Vigilance Judge about this.”

One of the guards laughed.

“He’s the one who authorised your physical restraint, Tarrío, until you’re taken back to Daroca.”

They brought me food on a plastic tray and freed one of my

hands so I could eat. I moved slowly, to give my arms some time to relax. I ate with my left hand, sitting on the bed with the tray on my knees, while observing the group of guards who surrounded me armed with pepper-spray and batons. When I looked at them they looked away. They seemed uncomfortable. I knew them all from stays in prison, years before in Juvenile. I talked with one of them to gain some time.

“Why do you have that club?” I asked him.

Such a direct question surprised him and for a moment it appeared ridiculous to him, faced with a man chained to a bed.

“Man, Tarrío, you know...”

“You know, you know... it’s like you don’t know what else to say.”

“Following orders, Tarrío, besides it’s you that’s been violent lately. Nothing good is going to come of it...”

“So you’re thinking of assaulting me with it right?”

“Yes, if necessary. If you behave yourself, no.”

“Can I smoke? I have tobacco in the other cell.”

“Just one cigarette,” interjected the Head Warden.

They gave me a Spanish Winston. I lit it and smoked it slowly. The atmosphere in the cell was very tense, which in the profound silence was very uncomfortable. Once I had finished my cigarette they cuffed me again to the bed by my left hand, after which they left.

Night fell. My arms ached a lot from being immobilised and thoughts crowded my mind violently. I needed to piss but I couldn’t call them. They wouldn’t hear me shouting from in here. And if something happened to me in here? Nothing.

The judge would rule my passing away as a normal death, handing over my body to my mother with the cynical condolences of the State.

This punishment disgusted me. I didn’t consider it legitimate. Not even when it was to put a stop to my escape attempts or to guarantee the safety of the guards who worked there. They had the right to defend themselves and I recognised that, but not in such a miserable

manner. My actions were solely to try and escape and not to injure anyone. Theirs were meant to damage men. To destroy their integrity, their physical resistance and to break their will. When applying a punishment, the Administration didn't consider the physical or behavioural damage that it could cause to the criminal, only that its own interests weren't damaged. It was a primitive solution. For the Administration and for society this punishment was legitimate, but torture was a serious and illegitimate aggression by the State. The punisher was no better than the punished. It is never legitimate to torture, torture is not educational, it's just revenge. So why carry it out? It is obvious torture does not rehabilitate anyone, which is the supposed point of prison treatment, which is an act of punishment, itself a repressive action, the use of physical (and moral) force. Also it could only temporarily obtain good behaviour from the individual who momentarily submits, forced to by the intimidation of the Administration and its array of possible punishments.

It was ridiculous and an insulting hypocrisy. How could they try to re-educate anybody if they didn't at least know how to forgive them? How could they claim to be just? If there was no forgiveness, the punishment turned into revenge. The Administration and society weren't above envy, resentment, contempt, and revenge. How could they show me that my infractions were my responsibility and were deserving of punishment, when there were daily examples of how the people carrying out the punishments broke the law without being punished, reprimanded, or even warned?

The following morning at roll call, they wouldn't let me out to go to the toilet, so, unable to hold it in any more, I pissed my pants. They didn't give me any breakfast or come to see me until lunchtime. They served me a tray with hot stewed potatoes, which I ate hungrily under the attentive stares of my tormentors. They didn't let me change my clothes or shower or get any kind of medical attention. I spent the whole day handcuffed in the same condition. I would have to endure it until the following day when the Guardia

Civil would come for me. It seemed funny but I wanted them to come soon and take me out of this situation.

The night was very cold. I tried to sleep but only got small naps. My arms tortured me constantly.

The next day the police came to get me. They took me out to the entrance in handcuffs. Crossing the yard escorted by the guards the prisoners in the Juvenile wing saw me off.

“Take care Che, keep your head up.”

“You too...!” I shouted towards them, smiling.

Once at the gatehouse they swapped the prison handcuffs for police ones (they were different). They cuffed me alone; the rest of the prisoners were cuffed in pairs. They were also being transferred. We all greeted each other before we took off. One of the guards warned the head of the Guardia Civil about me.

“Careful with that one, he’s an escape artist and a lot of trouble.”

“Yes, we know him,” he answered.

Then he spoke to me:

“Tarrío, I hope we have a peaceful journey. You’re going alone. If you need to go to the toilet ring the bell in the cage and we’ll take you out. Don’t try anything or make me cuff you to the chair for the whole journey, all right?”

There was no hostility in his voice. He knew how to treat me and did it tactfully, to which I responded in a calming way.

“Fair enough. As long as, if I ask to go into the corridor for a bit to stretch my legs and go to the toilet, you let me. In that case you won’t have any problems.”

“Very good.”

We went out towards the van. First my companions, then I went after them. Several policemen escorted me. In front of the entrance, smiling, the pretty document-checker jailer shook her head from side to side to indicate she thought I was crazy. I rewarded her with my biggest smile and with a complicit wink of the eye. When I passed her she had this to say to me:

“Are you always smiling, Tarrío?”

“It keeps me entertained. See you again, beautiful.” I answered cheerfully.

“Good luck.”

They put me inside one of the twenty cages in the van. I was glad to be alone, since it gave me greater freedom of movement. The filth in the cells hadn't changed a bit, but I was already dirty and covered in piss so this wasn't important at the time. On leaving La Coruña, they let me out to take a piss. They let me walk in the corridor, talking with the other prisoners while smoking a cigarette. The rest of the convicts talked through the cages and shouted out their destinations, their sentences, and other personal questions. I went to the toilet, pissing as best I could into a hole while the van was moving, and went back to my cell to let other prisoners leave theirs. We all took turns.

That afternoon we arrived in León, where we were taken to cells to spend the night. I was put into a cell with some other prisoners, which relieved my desire to talk. I also took advantage of the occasion to wash up in the toilet block with several buckets of water and changed my clothes. It felt great.

The next day we continued driving towards the prison of Carabanchel in Madrid. We arrived there about three in the afternoon, tired and exhausted from the long drive. We would be kept here for a few days until the prison vans took us to our respective destinations.

They kept us in handcuffs until we were inside the jail where they removed our chains. The police left once they had delivered their human cargo. Several guards brought us to the Fingerprint Department and made us leave all our possessions there. Then, as there were a lot of us, they took us to some American cells, which were different from the normal ones in that their front wall was completely made of bars, like the cages in a zoo. They were located in a basement, down some steps underneath the entrance. They put me in there with some other prisoners.

My companions cracked jokes and laughed among themselves.

I didn't join the party. I sat on a stone and recalled events that had happened there years before which had been told to me by some older prisoners. My imagination took me back to 1978, when I was only ten years old. In the third tier of this jail a tunnel was discovered and in it were several prisoners. One of them, an anarchist named Agustín Rueda Sierra, was interrogated about the rest of the prisoners who had helped in the making of the tunnel, in the cell in which we were now all held. There, supervised by a doctor, he was beaten for several days. Agustín Rueda completely refused to collaborate with the Administration or to give up the names of his comrades in escape. They continued beating him, as a result of which he died a few days later. The Director-General of the Penal Institution, Jesús Haddad Blanco came to the defence of the guards who had thrashed that man to death. GRAPO [First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups, clandestine Maoist group—T.N.], in reprisal for the murder of Agustín Rueda, put an end to the life of the Director General on 22 March in an attentat.

Now, imagining this scene: a man, stripped naked and handcuffed to the bars of the cell, refusing to give up the names of his companions and accepting death by beating, I asked myself, how many blows does it take to kill a man? Twenty? Fifty? A hundred? Thinking of this made my hair stand on end and a deep chill went through my body, filling me with admiration for this man who knew how to be one. It also filled me with a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability when faced with the prison underworld.

*You float in my shadow,
your endings navigate through my avenging darkness;
you are the assembly of the I representative of friends,
a common voice raised against shoddy goods.
By my crown loyalty materialized,
to the comfort of lodgings it will materialize shapes with furniture
of feeling, as the tooth bought from my saw to your saw in the circle,
outstanding tenant, of me in you,*

*in the chasm of my purest thought.
In a murderous ordeal we will stop them all,
until we throw ourselves in wild attack;
until we impregnate with blood the fertility of other doubts,
in cities of steel and concrete with a drumroll in our chest.
For you comrade, the torches light up the depths.
We endure the weight of injustice in a thousand places
and we rise in solidarity for the orchards of hair,
that scratch the temples of mourning.
Men raise their dignity in the steps of a crowd,
they arrive at the summit among spasms of ideas
and the worms of the dead shoot out in the undulating dance of
his zenith.
The tendons again strangle the blood
blood cells shoot out distributed in threads
until the mountain falls from its base,
and everything goes out with the clear light of the moon.*

To the memory of Agustín Rueda

A few hours later they came to move us, after fingerprinting us in admissions, to the American cells on the sixth floor. They assigned me one of those dirty and repugnant cells.

I had to wait several days until the transport van to Zaragoza came to collect me along with some other prisoners. During exercise time I met up with Lolo, *el Carmona*, a friend of mine who I had met in this same place on a previous occasion. We walked and talked together:

“Where are you coming from now, Lolo?”

“From Santander,” he told me, “now they’re taking me to the first grade in Daroca.”

“Then we’ll be travelling there together.”

“The day after tomorrow, right?”

“Yes.”

Daroca Prison, Zaragoza, October 1990

After an exhausting journey we were met in Daroca by a group of guards. They searched us, passed us through a metal detector, and soon assigned us to unit one (for the uncontrollables), to serve our sentences. There I met my friend José María Expósito. Through him I learned that the escape his brothers had organised in Pontevedra, while I was imprisoned there, had been foiled by police intervention. I was sorry about that.

Inside the prison trouble was brewing and there was tension in the air. A prisoner in this unit had recently been killed by another with a knife in the heart—a commonplace settling of accounts amongst us. Also, a valued comrade, companion in the revolt and riot at Zamora, known as Rufino, had died at the age of 21 from AIDS.

He had been released in agony only hours before his death. He didn't reach Madrid alive. He died in the car on his way home, in the arms of his mother.

There was a foreboding atmosphere of soon-to-come violence, of rage, so the prison was visited by an inspector from the Director General of Penal Institutes. They picked two prisoners from each unit to talk to him, to explain the problems of all the rest. Together with another companion I was chosen as one of the spokesmen of unit one. The meeting took place in an empty office in the infirmary, which was not usually used for anything. My companion went in first while I waited my turn, accompanied by a pair of guards. When the interview with my companion ended I went into the office. There, sitting on a chair behind a table, I encountered a well-dressed and immaculately groomed man. He greeted me with a fake smile. He was trying to create a climate of confidence between us.

He greeted me:

“Hi, how are you?”

I sat down in a chair in front of him answering curtly: “Hello.”

“You are José Tarrío, right?” he asked, consulting a list of names

written in a white folder.

“Yes, I come from unit one.”

“Good, good. I have come to talk to you all to see if you have anything to tell me. You know we had a death here from a stabbing not long ago. We want to eradicate this and other troublesome aspects of this prison, which has always been very troubled. How is it living here?”

“Things are bad here, to answer your last question. As for the rest, violence exists and will continue to exist as long as the prisons maintain savage, repressive policies and as long as they force all the prisoners to stay in the same place, without taking other human elements into consideration, which would be the logical thing to do.”

“What elements?” he interrupted.

“Prisoners should serve their time in their respective communities, to avoid fights between men from different regions and to avoid the brutality inflicted on all of us by the break down of families. It is impossible for our families to travel hundreds of kilometres to visit us for just thirty minutes through a glass barrier. Also, we have no workshops or activities. The guys spend the whole exercise time pacing the yard, without any entertainment other than walking and, the rest of the time, twenty-two hours out of twenty-four locked in a cell, and it's like this is every day of the week, every month, every year. We are prohibited from having contact visits; we spend years separated from our family, or without sleeping with a woman. This generates violence, sir, in the majority of convicts serving long sentences.”

I paused to catch my breath and organise my thoughts. I continued:

“All of us prisoners in first grade are very aggressive. That is why we end up here. If, on top of this, we are subjected to a degrading regime and we lack basic necessities, what do you expect? Here the infirmary doesn't work like it should: we have AIDS prisoners sick in the yards without access to proper medical assistance. The infirmary here is as bad as they get. To get a simple gymnasium built we had

to destroy the entire jail, which shows that sometimes our violence is effective, or if it isn't, at least it is the only option that is left to us. Prisoners are beaten for trivial things, and that doesn't help, sir. I won't say that you instigate violence on purpose, but I am saying that you can't see the reality from your comfortable chairs and lack of human experience. The prisoners do see all these things, which brutalize us on a daily basis, until we become cruel and even unfeeling."

"Well! You don't leave me much of a choice. You see things very negatively from prison, Tarrío. We can do some good, can't we?" he interrupted me again, his right hand playing with a Bic pen.

I looked around the office for a moment; then my eyes fell on a packet of smokes which sat alongside a lighter on the table. I became cynical.

"Listen here. I don't know why you came here, but it's not me who has to defend the terror that you use to punish us in prison. In 1980 there were twenty thousand inmates in Spanish prisons, now there are forty thousand. I sincerely think that you people are incompetent, that you don't have any solution to a social problem that you've been charged with dealing with. How many years have you had the same problems before you? For every prisoner who is semi-rehabilitated, you create five new delinquents. Prison has turned into a business, not a solution." I took a moment to breathe and continued, getting emotional. "Prison itself is violent, sir: it is the school of crime for delinquents like me, the university of evil... My companions and I constitute the meat you feed your jailers, your wages, your big business. I can't hope for anything from a person I think is deaf to the world, who has no feelings, no intention of dealing with anything not strictly in your own interests. Good day..." I finished, threw myself up out of my chair and left the office.

A little longer and I would have thrown myself at him. No! They would never change anything. Penal institutions send inspectors when something serious happens or when they think something serious is about to happen. They try to calm things down with promises that

are never kept. This interview was pure routine, bureaucracy to fill up papers and more papers and a justification of the work of those who direct the repressive institutions from Madrid. These papers were the proof these bureaucrats presented to society, showing their concern with prison. No, this interview would change nothing, just as nothing would change from the hundreds of complaints from the prisoners to the JVP [Prison Supervision Courts] or the Penal Instructional Courts. The solution to the problems inside the jails was solely to be found in prisoners unifying their demands, and in kidnappings, riots, uprisings, and occupations. Only with greater violence could an end be put to these destructive regimes. What we needed was armed struggle in the prisons, and a mass uprising with demands proclaimed to society through the media together with the cries of terror of the torturers turned into hostages. We had to extend the fight to every corner of every prison, from the special regimes, to the closed regimes and the second grade regimes. At least this was what they thought inside the destructive special regime in Herrera de la Mancha. There, prisoners co-ordinated by Javier Ávila Navas had formed the Association of Special Regime Prisoners (APRE[r]), composed initially of five inmates inside the regime. It was with ideas like this that Laudelino Iglesias, Luis Rivas Dávila, Vicente Sánchez, Antonio Losa López, and Javier Ávila Navas (who had recently been caught) went on the offensive and created one of the strongest and most important associations in the penal history of Spain. No one, least of all the Penitential Institution, could imagine the events that would briefly come to light once theories turned into action, nor could we imagine the consequences they would bring in response from the Spanish state.

The cell I occupied in unit one was narrow but long, which allowed me to walk for long periods of time. For the last month I had been feeling quite worried about my health. I didn't have the normal peace of mind that allowed me to concentrate for hours on a book or on writing extensive revolutionary missives to my family

and friends. I felt anxious, frequently had heart palpitations, and felt like I was asphyxiating. I needed space and had to stick my head to the window to feel the air on my face to free me from the feeling of brutal oppression that was overpowering me. This, along with the constant thought of AIDS, made me feel perpetually paranoid. I was suffering psychologically, and I automatically related every little symptom to death. The possibility that death could find me in jail and the idea that these cold walls would be the last thing I saw started to turn uneasily in my imagination. I had broken off all relations with the doctors, who disgusted me with all that they had done and agreed to do to the prisoners, so I struggled through these bad times as best I could. I had too much pride to ask for help from these bastards disguised as doctors, who brought shame on the noble profession of medicine, which was created to cure people, not to destroy them. One of the things that most worried me was the impact on me of the death of Rufino. AIDS took only thirty days to reduce him to nothing, to a pile of bones with a human shape. It was stunning and horrible. They had neglected to grant him an Article 60 until the last moment (Article 60 requires the Administration to release all prisoners and detainees who are in terminal phases of medically-certified irreversibly fatal illnesses). It was one thing to die and another very different thing to slowly rot away, to be in agony for days with your body full of needles and tubes, covered in open sores.

The visit of the inspector from General Direction, as we expected, changed nothing in Daroca prison. The regime continued to be brutal, repressive, and destructive. You spent twenty-two hours out of twenty-four inside a cell, unless you were in a punishment cell on the whim of a guard who, bored senseless, had nothing better to do. Camaraderie was prohibited. So, when one prisoner was caught passing some coffee to another through a window, he was transferred to unit five where the guards beat him out of earshot of the rest of the prisoners (thus avoiding us beating on the doors in protest). Then they chained him to his bed and left him there until the following

day. When they finally uncuffed him they left him in isolation for a stretch. Terror and impunity. Sometimes they didn't even let us talk through the windows, though normally we took no notice of this. This cost us stretches of seven or fourteen days in isolation, if not a beating as well. The closed regime was divided into three groups: the first for those considered the worst behaved, the second for those partially reformed, and a third for those considered to have adapted to the regime and who were being prepared to pass from first grade into second grade, a more open regime. There was individual therapy intended to divide us into groups through an industrial behaviourism of human conduct, based on rewarding what they considered positive, and punishing what they considered negative. If you wanted to get out of there you had to jump through hoops and submit to a series of humiliations designed to strip a man of his personality and judgement. They offered you a move from one unit to another, from one prison to another, as "progress", as if the prison itself and these walls weren't the real problems and the sources of our unease and suffering. They offered a contact visit with family or girlfriend, a television or use of the sports facilities, as if these weren't rights listed in the prison regulations but rewards for good conduct. If you didn't behave adequately, they took away your "privileges" and demoted you as a group. They used emotional manipulation as an educational tool; if you are good, you can see your mother; if you are bad, you can't. They treated us just like children, looking to break our spirit, to get us to accept our punishment, to make us understand the prison and justify it. It was demented, diabolical: suitable for one of the most ambitious, meanest and most repressive minds of the era, that of the Director General of Penal Institutes, Antoni Asunción.

One week after the visit of the inspector, José María Expósito sent me a message through other prisoners from unit two. I read the small piece of paper:

Che, tomorrow you're being transferred; I heard it from one of the

workers. I will send you money and more supplies if you need them. You're going to Tenerife 2. Take care and be strong.

*Your friend,
José María.*

This was their response to my statements and demands. As if I weren't far enough from La Coruña, they were transferring me to an island in Africa. In a moment of humour I realised the only reason they couldn't send me any further away was because, fortunately, Spain no longer had any foreign colonies. Do you think they would have sent me to Guinea, the Sahara, or a lost island in the Pacific Ocean? What a nightmare! Also, the behaviour of the guard who had leaked the news surprised me. In spite of an express order to not notify me of the transfer under any circumstances, in order to catch me off guard, this guard had told to my friend, knowing that he in turn would tell me. He did me a disinterested favour, for a moment regressing to his human condition in looking to help me, who knows for what reason. I think that some of them are unhappy, a minority who are uncomfortable with their work of taking revenge on behalf of society. Through actions like this, they rebel a little against the mechanisation and dehumanisation that has transformed them into mere tools without feeling, into instruments of torture and nothing more. When all is said and done, we are all human and we need to silence our conscience in some manner, the internal voice that tells us about those actions that we realise are against our principles. Right?

I bade farewell to Carmona and the rest of the comrades. I gathered my things and got as much money as possible for the trip. I entrusted a prisoner to call my family in La Coruña and tell them of my transfer. The following morning, when they opened door of the cell I was in, they found me dressed with all my belongings packed in three bags. I was prepared for the exodus.

We went to the jail in Carabanchel on the outskirts of Madrid, where I was held in transit for three days and then I met the van

that went to Cádiz. We spent a night in Córdoba. At the prison there were problems with the search. We were all locked in the cells, stripped, and told to bend double. I felt humiliated and refused.

“What?” said a guard surprised, “you won’t bend over?”

“Right. If you want to search me, you have to do it in a separate space, because I’m not going to strip in public.”

“What’s going on?” intervened another of the guards. “Is it because you’re better than the rest?”

“No, but it doesn’t seem like this is the right way to book someone; if the others let you do it, that’s their problem, not mine.”

They put me in one of the cells alone. The rest of the prisoners were taken away and once they were locked up, the wardens came back to visit me, accompanied by the Head Warden whose badge shone proudly on his chest.

“Let’s see, Tarrío, what’s the problem?” he asked me.

“Nothing, except I won’t be treated like cattle.”

“Come on! Take your clothes off.”

I stripped and gave them the clothes I wore so that they could inspect them. Once naked one of them ordered:

“Bend over.”

“No,” I answered. I saw the Head Warden giving orders with a look and he ordered me again.

“Very well. If you’re going to be like that you can go right to the punishment cells, no tobacco or shop. Your belongings can stay here, since you won’t need them. We’ll allow you a couple of blankets.”

After I dressed they took me to isolation, where I was put inside one of the cells. It was small. Stuck in the wall a small window looked out at a sad grey wall in front of it. It hardly let in any sunlight. Dust and ashes everywhere. It seemed degrading and humiliating that we were made to do naked stretches, showing our assholes to others to satisfy insane whims of a group of apprentice jailers. The poses were humiliating, at least that’s how it felt the times I had done them, and a man shouldn’t have to do things that damage his self-esteem, ever.

The prisoners had to stop collaborating with the Administration and submitting to all their whims. Punishment was preferable. It wasn't more practical, it's true, but it was more dignified. We could not continue bending over, naked, in public, when other companions suffered beatings and punishments in other prisons for refusing to do them, so as to eradicate the practice once and for all, as well as to eradicate all prisons and degrading treatments. Now I was being punished because the other prisoners had accepted bending over. If all of us refused to do them, surely they could not punish everyone, and we would have avoided it being repeated with other prisoners in other intakes. It was a matter of dignity and pride.

With my dinner, they gave me a couple of dirty blankets that smelled rotten. I threw them in a corner of the cell and, after eating continued walking through the night until the following day when I continued on my journey to Cádiz with the rest of the prisoners.

Puerto de Santa María, November 1st, 1990

Through the metal bars of the Guardia Civil transport van appeared the legendary prison of Puerto de Santa María. It seemed big and solitary, made of red bricks. It was guarded by the Policía Nacional. In the van a silence came over everyone and the handcuff keys, valuables, and other prohibited objects returned to their hiding places. The automatic gates that led into the yard opened up and the van went inside, stopping in front of the entrance doors. We had arrived. We left the van in pairs, collected our belongings, and travelled inside. There a group of guards waited for us. After fingerprinting us, we were transferred to the punishment cells known as "The Dome" because they were at the very top of the building. They put each of us in one of those cells after thorough searches of the person and their belongings. The dungeons of Puerto de Santa María were extraordinarily small and brutally oppressive. It was impossible to walk around in them, so the prisoner had to remain seated or lying in bed. Years before, the

prisoners jailed there had to remain standing or sitting all day. It was forbidden to lie in bed, smoke, or talk. I washed my face in the sink and pissed in the toilet beside it, which was situated flush with the ground and had been blocked with a plastic bottle full of water: a cover to keep out smells and the nocturnal visits of rats. I looked out the aluminium window. In front of and underneath the Dome was the prison infirmary. There were several men in there, one of them visibly feeble. I could tell from his extreme thinness that he had AIDS. He walked around the room, lost, and his eyes, darkened by encroaching death, lacked any light. I didn't bother him. I remembered then that my fellow Galician, Fernández Mariño, had died in that room years before from this terrible disease. I didn't know him, but we had friends in common who had talked about him. He was a true rebel, a born fighter, one of the instigators of the first riot with hostages that had occurred in this feared and infamous jail. Thanks to him and Antonio Mateo (who also died from AIDS) it had been possible to change the harshest regime in the Spanish prison system, a regime that had lasted several decades, restraining and terrorizing the hardest and most dangerous criminals in the country. It was people like Fernández and Antonio, together with Ortiz Jiménez, Zamaro Durán, Maya Martos, Fernández Varela, and Redondo Fernández, who carried out the kidnapping of guards with an eye to revenge, trading blow for blow, and publicly protesting through the media against the subhuman conditions of Spanish prisons. Without a doubt we owed them a lot, all of us. Men like Fernández Mariño and Antonio Mateo deserve to be remembered with a lot of respect for being, among other things, the first to start the fight against the system in defence of the AIDS prisoners, who had begun to die inside the prisons due to the cynical indifference of the Administration.

The following day, after the obligatory photo and a brief interview with a social worker, I was transferred to unit two, where I found my friend Anxo walking in the yard.

"What's up, Anxo?" I greeted, hugging him.

“What are you doing here, fucker?” he asked.

“I’m going to Tenerife 2, I’m just passing through, and you?”

“I’m coming from Salto del Negro in Las Palmas. They grabbed us in the yard, Garfia and I, trying to scale the wall. Now I don’t know where I’m going.”

“Fucking hell! Well, you’ll do it better next time, no?” I joked.

“Of course...”

We walked in circles around the square yard under a blue sunny sky.

“And how is it in here?” I asked him.

“Calm, very calm as far as the guards. It seems they learned something with the last kidnappings. As for the rest, nothing major.”

“That’s what it seems like.”

He was right. The mythical and terrible prison of Puerto de Santa María was not the hell of the past. Now we could talk through the windows, something that years before was unthinkable. The prisoners could send coffee to those locked in cells without fear of a beating. They didn’t beat prisoners with the flimsiest excuses, or use night-time visits to exercise intimidation. Sometimes a repressed guard would let it out, destroying a cell and throwing belongings on the floor, but it was nothing more than the rage of a frustrated torturer whose greatest expression in life had been to feel accomplished in the lowest and vilest abuse. For them, without a heavy hand, there was no terror, and without terror no discipline. It was what they had practised all their life. They hated us, because to them we were the scum of society. In reality there was nothing more miserable in the world than the job of executioner. People in that job lived frightened and under cover, always fearing for their lives. In the street they had no friends apart from other guards; society despised them. They knew it, and that made them even worse; it made them resentful, mean, and intolerant. And they drowned out this reality in the prison where they felt important. Yes, the atmosphere at Puerto had changed, but the people working there hadn’t, and at

the smallest opportunity the old brutality would come back, the beatings and the twisted mentality that characterised most of the employees. The prison system won't change until the guards change; without a doubt they were responsible for a lot of abuse and torture. While they were still there, it would continue.

Several days later while I was walking on the yard they transferred in Juan José Garfia. I went to the door of the unit and we talked through the bars.

"Man!" he exclaimed to me, "you're everywhere."

"Yeah, goes for you too, right?" I said smiling.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

"I'm going to Tenerife 2."

"You got lucky, I hear it's easy to escape from there, so good luck..."

"And what's going on with you? Anxo told me about Salto del Negro. Bad luck."

"Yeah, bad luck."

"You have any money?"

"No, not a penny. I spent it all on the boat on beer."

"I'll send you some soon alright."

"Thanks."

Two weeks later I left for Tenerife. I said goodbye to my friends, and at about eleven I was driven in a small prison van to the port of Cádiz. Once there we stopped in front of a huge ferry, called *Manuel Soto* as I could read on its prow. After waiting for a few minutes we were allowed to pass over a bridge and into the car deck where other vans and buses were parked. I was handcuffed and taken to the cell-cabin situated beside the engine room below the water line. The noise of the motors warming up was deafening. The cell consisted of a bunk with two beds, a toilet, and a hatch in the door through which they would give me food. I was guarded by two Guardia Civil cops who were friendly with me, getting me a few beers from the bar and some tobacco with the money I gave them. It was a peaceful voyage.

Part 3: The Path of Rebellion

What is freedom? What is Slavery? Does the freedom of man consist of rebellion against all laws? Yes, as long as there are political and judicial laws imposed by men on men and women, through the right of force, violently, hypocritically, in the name of religion or some metaphysical doctrine, or, finally, in the name of this democratic lie which calls itself universal suffrage.

— M. Bakunin

Canary Islands, Tenerife Prison 2, November 1990

On the third day, at about ten in the morning, the *Manuel Soto* reached the port in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. The great roar of the engines grew silent but still rang in my ears. I was handcuffed again through the hatch and taken to the van along with my belongings. We travelled from Santa Cruz to La Laguna and from there to Esperanza, where the mountain is that holds the prison. The prison was big and the grey walls were very high. A long bridge guarded by a pair of Guardia Civil extended from the centre of the prison to a small landing nearby, crossing over the grounds and a small valley. After passing through two enormous mechanical doors the van stopped inside a small garage, which led into the admissions area. Once there, the jailers took charge of me, and, after I was fingerprinted and stripped, an extensive search of my person and belongings was carried out. I was taken to one of the units. They were in the form of detached houses and there was space between them for paved paths and small gardens. I caught sight of a swimming pool. To tell the truth I was surprised. It was all new to me. I was assigned a cell in the intake unit and, surprise upon surprise, they left it open so I could serve myself from the vending machine and eat with the other prisoners in the canteen. It had been three years since I'd eaten with anybody except the solitude of the cells I had occupied. I was free to move around which made me a little uncomfortable. I went to a table with two Africans and I acted serious

and reserved with them. I ate in silence, observed by the rest of the prisoners. It was bizarre, but at that moment I would have preferred to be alone in the cell than there with the others.

After eating, I went, along with the other prisoners, to the shutter of the cafeteria. It was managed by a *travesti* with large breasts who everyone knew as Lola. *Travestis* and gays were common there. I asked for a couple of black coffees.

“Two coffees.”

“You’re the new guy, right?” she asked curiously. “Where are you coming from?”

‘From Zaragoza.’

“Ah, you’re a *godo*.” From which part?’

“What’s a *godo*?” I asked touchily.

“It’s what we call people from the Peninsula here.”

“My name is José and I’m from La Coruña—I’m Galician.”

“Beautiful place, Galicia. My name is Lola.”

“I know.”

Once I had the coffees I left Lola. I had a bit of difficulty treating this guy like a woman but to respect her feelings I would call her by her feminine name. I came to like her, because during siesta hour, while she cleaned the unit and the canteen with some other prisoners, she came to see me. I was locked in the cell, so she talked to me through the grille in the door.

“Hello,” she greeted me.

“Hello.”

“You’re staying here?”

“Yes,” I answered her, “though they’ll take me to isolation soon. I’m a first grade prisoner so it’s strange that they have me here.”

“They’ll take you to the other part of the prison, on the other side of that sentry box,” she explained to me, pointing at a nearby shelter.

“Right.”

“Have you showered yet?” She came at me with a smile somewhere between wicked and mischievous.

“Not yet,” I answered.

“Why don’t you shower now?” she invited me.

“No thank you,” I cut her off. “Stop flirting with me. I respect your way of being but nothing more than that, understand?”

“Well, fine.”

That afternoon I was transferred to the adjoining unit: isolation. I was assigned one of the cells on the lower floor. So far the treatment had been decent, even surprisingly so. The cell they had assigned me was furnished with a shower beside the sink and toilet, both stainless steel embedded in the concrete. A stone table and a metal seat had been placed in front of one of the two windows, on which square bars were welded horizontally. A concrete bed and some small closets gave the final touches to the cell. I put my things away and made the bed. Then I showered and fell into bed, reflecting on it all. This was completely different from the prisons I had lived in on the peninsula. The relaxed atmosphere was disconcerting. The guards had treated me with brevity and the cells were in a reasonably habitable and hygienic condition. I didn’t feel the harassment or oppressive sensation of the first grade prisons from which I had come; in fact, I almost felt euphoric. This whole complex of units and walls smelled of escape. The bridge I had seen upon entering, which crossed over the whole complex, ran constantly through my imagination. The jail was new and this fact meant that perhaps the security system was vulnerable at some point. The question was where. All prisons, absolutely all of them, have some weakness but not all prisoners could see this. It was important to take advantage of the occasions when they presented themselves and had a probability of success. If the attempt failed the authorities would fix that weakness and reinforce the security in the whole prison. When one of us failed, the methods we used were reported to the Directorate General, which advised the whole prison system. The system in time adopted new measures to limit the possibilities of other prisoners who had placed their hopes in escape. That is why I had to better inform myself of the chance to reach my

objective. It wasn't right to rush an escape.

The following morning I went out to the yard with the rest of the prisoners who were in the unit. Two of them belonged to ETA; the other three were regulars, like myself. We all came from the mainland and had been sentenced there, although at times we were joined by others who were sent to serve an isolation sentence. The unit consisted of two ground floors with two small yards and a room with a TV. They told me how it all worked. The food was good and plentiful. The medical team was made up of real professionals and we had access to a yoga teacher, a well-stocked library, and four hours a day on the yard. They also told me that the director would call to talk with me, and what he would say. I was to expect a visit from him.

During free time, I received a visit from one of the doctors in a small consulting room beside the common room.

"Hello, can you tell me your name?" he asked me.

"José Tarrío González."

"Good. I noticed in your medical records that you've been HIV positive for a few years, so we will give you some special dietary supplements in addition to the normal food, you know, yogurt, bread rolls, fresh fruit. Does that sound good?"

"It sounds great," I answered.

"How are you doing at the moment?"

"Good for now."

After filling out some paperwork, we parted with a handshake. Never before had a doctor treated me as professionally as this man had. Until then in no prison had they bothered to give me a dietary supplement and here I was getting one without even asking for it. Although this doctor didn't know it, this was the first time that I had shook hands with one of them, which was an important moment for me.

Thanks to this supplement I decided to run several days of the week in the yard to keep fit, as essential to an escapist as wind is to a

bird. I took occasional yoga classes taught by a yogi. For these classes, we were taken in turns to the common room, and there, sitting on blankets, we practised breathing from a lotus position, or positions and exercises such as the sun salutation. At that time yoga didn't interest me a lot, but these small basic exercises along with the books I read on the topic would be a lot of use to me in the future. I also started to read again. There was an extensive library from which I was given books I wanted on any subject without any restrictions on the number I could borrow. I discovered Albert Camus, whose works made a big impression on me. I re-read Shakespeare and enjoyed *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* by Euripides. Tragedy fascinated me. What these incomparable psychologists had written out on their parchments were insights on real life—pain, conflict, vanity, anxiety, pleasure, some joy, depression, envy, resentment, love (or hate), the worshipping of golden calves, and finally, death; our efforts and futile vanities turned into worm food, fertiliser and manure for the earth.

As I had been told, I was taken that afternoon to the Director's office. Escorted by two guards, we passed through some gardens near the centre where the offices were, beside the infirmary and the TV room. I paid close attention. From there we went up some stairs to the second floor where all the files, offices, and bureaucracy of the prison were located. After passing through corridors and doors they took me into the office of the head honcho. Once there they left us alone.

"Sit down," he said, in an authoritative but polite voice.

I sat in front of him in a comfortable chair, steadily watching him.

"I'm going to be clear and direct with you, Tarrío. It's obvious that you're somewhat troublesome and difficult. I hope that that changes here and that you cooperate with the regime. You will have already noticed that we permit certain liberties inside the unit. Behave well and you'll see how much better off you will be," he said, in a speech I knew had been practised before, from the eloquent run

of his words. After a pause he continued: "Your papers don't count for anything here and your past doesn't interest us, only what you do from here on in. Have I made myself clear?"

"Yes, and it seems very good what you're offering me here but the Penal Rules allow me all that I need to get by, which is more than enough, so if that is fulfilled, everything will be fine on my part. The truth is that I am being treated with respect, which I appreciate. I'm not accustomed to being treated well, you know?" I added cautiously.

"We hope that you can cooperate and can progress quickly to second grade, so behave well. That's all I want to say."

"Very good."

On leaving the office, through the corridor and back into the unit I got another look at the bridge, which ended there. I memorised it all. I decided to try something. The offer from the Administration had come too late. Maybe they were attempting to erase the past with the stroke of a pen, to give or take away privileges on a whim. How easily they can make a man into a machine! It could even be that this time it might have been in good faith, but I wouldn't lend myself to psychological experiments. I had difficulty with the director's proposal. I was supposed to forget? The insults, the abuse, the constant degrading searches, the beatings and chains, the transfers in cages? Or the medical neglect shown to the thousands of prisoners sick with AIDS and other illnesses, the punishment cells, the misery of man destroying man? Forget that I was an AIDS carrier and that our kind were left to die in cold cells, in pain for years, or in the wards of a prison hospital cuffed to a bed? Forget the treatment given to the sick, most of them young addicts jailed for minor offences committed in order to get drugs? Forget what, Mr. Director? That I was one of those worthless beings who were so often left to die in prison, in the name of an obscure revenge that the hearts of the citizens called for? Or should I say executioners? I had never hidden my hatred for the system, especially the prisons. Nor

would I start now. I was more than convinced that despite my many defects, there was more decency and love in my bandit's soul, which everyone pointed accusing fingers at, than in the entirety of the men who developed, planned, and implemented my confinement. I would not participate in the endorsement of this system in exchange for some promises even if this meant a life sentence in isolation.

In the unit, routine reigned. I was in the habit of talking with one of the political prisoners through the grille in the cell door. Some afternoons he lent me his typewriter to type up some writings, which I sent afterwards to the judges who had sentenced me, in which I threatened to kill them. Maybe they would open a case against me and I would have the possibility of publicly protesting during the court case against the tortures carried out inside Spanish jails, and in any case I could try something. The main thing was to participate in some manner in the war against these men and institutions in charge of justice. One of the best ways to do it was to escape, through will and courage breaking this punishment inflicted on us, taking away the right to punish that they granted themselves, and freeing ourselves through rebellion, the path we were all led to.

I damaged the cell I was in, trying to get transferred to one of the cells on the lower floor, which led onto the bridge and the Guardia Civil sentry boxes. I succeeded after a chat with one of the guards. From this position I could observe the relatives of the prisoners coming into the visiting rooms over the bridge, just like the guards when changing shift. The complex had only one gate through which supply trucks and prison vans came through. The rest of the human traffic had to pass over the bridge to enter or leave. There were three checkpoints. The first was situated outside the prison; here they checked the documents of everyone when they entered and when they exited. The second consisted of two sentry boxes situated in the middle of the bridge, occupied by a couple of Guardia Civil, directly over the walls of the prison. The third was in the centre and contained several automatic doors that led into the interior of the

prison or to the nearby visiting rooms. At night the lighting was good and the attention of the guards constant; they barely relaxed. Nonetheless I discovered a small error concerning the lighting on the bridge. The lights, which shone primarily from the right side of the bridge, bounced off the concrete gangway, leaving hardly any light on the inside right slope of the bridge. If I could reach the bridge and get onto it without being seen then I could slide myself to the bottom onto the gangway, leaving the field of vision of the sentry on the right and protected from the left by the faulty lighting. What's more, the proximity of the sentries, separated only by the width of the bridge, only two metres, made the guards think it impossible that anyone would cross there right under their noses. At least that's what I hoped.

One of the doctors came to see me. We talked in the small infirmary in the unit.

"Tarrío, when did you last have blood work and a lymphocyte test?"

"They last gave me one in '88, in Pontevedra, but they didn't tell me the results..."

"But that's impossible, Tarrío," he interrupted me in surprise, "they are required to do a test every three months at least."

"Yeah, well check my medical records. It's not a mistake, all my medical experiences are there."

"It's hard to believe that, really."

I smiled ironically at him, as if inviting him to wake up from a dream.

"Well, we're going to give you a test here to see how your immune system is doing, all right?" he said while scribbling in a notebook. "How are you doing here?"

"Better than in other places that I've been, although for a few months I've had heart palpitations and symptoms of asphyxia in the nights and that can be pretty bad."

"How long have you been inside?"

“Three years.”

“No, I meant how long have you been in a closed regime?”

“Three years.”

“It’s no wonder then,” he answered. “Of course you have anxiety and some claustrophobia. I’m going to give you some medication to see how it goes, okay? When we have the results of the tests I’ll come to see you again and we’ll talk.”

“Good, thanks.”

“It’s nothing, don’t mention it.”

The results of the tests reflected a small drop in my immune system, although I wasn’t running any risk as I still had a T4 count around five hundred. (T4 is what they call killer cells in the immune system.) I talked with the doctor about this:

“Tarrío,” he explained, “the illness, as you know, is incurable. All we can do is hope that you have the most time possible before the virus goes full blown, which in your case is not likely to be all that long.” He took out a pack of cigarettes, offering me a smoke. I accepted and he continued. “If I could free you now, you and all the other HIV positive inmates, I would, but it isn’t possible. Prison in your case is especially destructive. As a doctor I can’t accept it, nor as a rational human being. In this case the opinion of the judges overrides the medical opinion, and even though it’s hard to accept it, I can only ask for freedom for a sick inmate when the illness is in its terminal phase, which means when you’re almost dead.”

“Yes I know that.”

“But in your case it’s even worse, Tarrío, since the prolonged isolation seriously harms you. The punishment cells produce an important reaction through suffering on a psychological level, which changes the neuro-vegetative and neuroendocrine systems. This impacts the immune system, weakening the body’s defences.”

“So the punishment they inflict on me makes my death come closer?”

“Yes, in fact. The logical idea would be for AIDS patients to be

moved to a more open centre and more allowances for medical treatment than in the high security regimes, but this is something that's a long way from reality."

"What can you advise me about precautions?"

"The best thing would be for you to leave the closed regime, gain more time on the exercise yard and more space, to try to avoid the oppression of the cells as much as possible. This would counteract your anxiety and the claustrophobic sensations that have come from three years in cells. I would also advise you to stop smoking and drinking coffee, and to do yoga or other regular exercise."

"I do some things."

"Good. How is the medicine I gave you?"

"Much better."

"Good, well stay positive and take care, okay?" He left.

It wasn't just words. During my stay in Tenerife the doctors, except for a couple of them, showed me impartial professionalism at all times, staying separate from the Administration. On the other hand, that conversation with the doctor charged with overseeing my health only gave me hope in escape and justified in a big way my position against the prison system. My fight was a legitimate one, as was the struggle of all those who refused to die or live in prison.

On November 12th the news on Radio Nacional surprised me. The prison of Foncalent in Alicante was in a bloody uprising, and several hostages had been taken. About 10:30 in the morning Antonio Cortés, known by the nickname *el Zorro*, took several guards hostage at knife point in unit four. From there he went along with other freed prisoners to units two and three where they in turn freed the rest of the inmates. They totally destroyed the prison and there were fights in which numerous prisoners were seriously injured, one of whom died, in several settlements of accounts. In the second day of the kidnapping most of the prisoners, after long negotiations, decided to abandon the rebellion and return to their cells, refusing to take any

further part in the protest and revenge. Other prisoners, however, continued on, opposing the surrender. They wanted to escape. So Antonio Cortés, Vicente Gómez, Francisco Sánchez, Pinteño Sánchez, and Héctor Guillén barricaded themselves on one of the floors of unit three with five guards as hostages. They demanded, under threat of killing the hostages, an armoured car, guns, and money. The negotiations were tense. The rest of the prisoners were locked in the cells of units two and four. The media commentators as well as the relatives of the injured and dead were harshly critical.

I knew that prison and isolation had created this situation and that the Administration had to take a large part of the responsibility. I understood the murderous rage of some of the men ready to risk their lives, tired of prison; in a way I shared it. But I was not in agreement with the death of that prisoner, nor with the stabbings that happened, nor with the many abuses that had happened once the cages had been opened. I couldn't understand why they would riot only to kill each other when it was a time to unite against the people truly responsible for the prison situation. This bout of savagery would inevitably put all public opinion against them and, as a result, against all of us. While we all awaited the outcome of negotiations with Antoni Asunción, the GEOS prepared an assault and took up positions where the hostages were being held.

It all came to an end at ten in the morning of the 15th, three days after it started. Two of the prisoners made a mistake. Pinteño and Serra went into one of the cells in the unit and one of the hostages in the cell locked the door with the latch. Soon after this the rest of the guards, encouraged by the actions of their companions, threw themselves on Francisco Sánchez, *el Rojo*, jumping him in unison. Then they shouted what had happened through the windows and the GEOS made their move, overpowering all of the prisoners, then giving them a beating with baseball bats, leaving them naked and handcuffed. I felt sorry for them since the truth was that they were very brave and had taken a huge gamble. I thought that if a guard had

been executed instead of a prisoner killed, they might have succeeded. But to talk and think was easy; it was much more difficult to act.

The media, obeying the monotonous voice of the master, gorged itself on the story and judged what had occurred as a savage act of a group of uncontrollable psychopaths. Nothing was said in any of the TV news or radio reports about what was happening inside the walls of that prison. Nobody mentioned that months before, irregularities had been reported in the treatment of the psychiatric prisoners, which was corroborated in the investigation of a visiting writer who reported that there were no trained medical staff and that those in charge of administering medicine to prisoners were the guards: people devoid of any medical training, ignorant of psychiatric or psychological matters, mostly high school drop-outs. Nor was anything said about the constant tortures to which the prisoners were subjected, such as cold-water showers, handcuffings to beds that lasted entire months, beatings, and the random use of strait jackets. This was never recalled or mentioned. The mercenaries of the pen continued prostituting themselves disgracefully, which no longer surprised me. They toed the line submissively. The horror of the prison tombs was known only by those of us imprisoned within them. What did these bastards know about prison? Acts like these could only be carried out by truly desperate people, and desperation comes when all hope is lost. All this violence was generated by the prison, by the deeds that happened daily behind these walls, which the majority of the well-known journalists and citizens refused to accept, although deep down they knew what happened there.

As for me, days later I began to cut through one of the bars on the window. I did that on just one of the sides, and, once I finished, I wrapped a thin piece of tape on the cut section and touched it up with some paint that was the same colour as the bars. To disguise it better I hung a pair of socks over it and some boxers, as if to dry.

One morning, one of the Basque prisoners, the same one who

had helped to get the tape and the paint, came to warn me of an imminent search. He approached me while I was walking:

“José, I heard they’re going to do a search.”

“Today?” I asked.

“In a little while.”

It happened. An hour later they appeared in a gang led by the Head Warden.

“If you’re going to search my belongings I want to be present. The Rules say I have the right to be present.”

“There’s no problem with you being there.”

I went into the cell, took all my books and other educational materials I had on the table, and put them on the bed with all my clothes. Then I sat on the table. Some guards, wearing latex gloves started to make a list of my possessions, while others searched the windows from outside. One of them talked to me from the other side of the window.

“Are these clothes dry?” he asked, pointing at the boxers.

I took them in my hand and answered him:

“No, they’re still damp. Why?”

“Because you can’t hang things on the windows.”

“I didn’t know.”

“Fine, but from now on dry them in your cell, all right?”

“Yes, sir...”

I had soaked them that morning before leaving the cell. For now I was in the clear.

The following night I acted. I hung a towel between the bars to block the view of the Guardia Civil sentries in front. Once covered, I pulled on the bar on the side that wasn’t cut; it bent as I had expected. I threw it on the bed and slid outside through the hole in the window. Then I went forward, crouching down until I reached a small wire fence, which I got over deftly and quickly. From there I went down the stairs of the admissions unit and, after jumping over a wall, moved towards the infirmary in the middle, crossing

several gardens. Once at the infirmary I climbed onto the roof of the entrance and from there onto the low roofs towards the centre, where, with the help of the window of one of the offices, I got up onto the main roof. I slid like a reptile towards the bridge until I was above it. I had to jump onto it and drag myself about sixty metres to the one place it was possible to jump from without breaking my legs. I waited about a half hour and, in a lapse of vigilance by the Guardia Civil (caused by the patrol car which did the rounds on the outside of the walls) I jumped to the ground without being seen, immediately sticking to the right hand side of the gangway. Once there I advanced slowly on my stomach. I kept watching the guard on the left, hoping for the luck of another distraction. Some minutes later it came. The guard turned his back to the bridge to look around at the grounds, so I climbed both sentry towers. I continued on without hesitation, with the taste of escape in my mouth and with my heart pounding a possessed rhythm. I had cleared the grounds and below me was the countryside. There were only a few metres to go to regain my freedom.

“If you move I’ll kill you like a dog you bastard!” shouted a guard, aiming his gun at my head.

He had come up the bridge from the first checkpoint before I had time to react.

“I have it under control,” he shouted to his outfoxed companions who now pointed their guns at my back.

I wanted to die. Several floodlights lit up my position, illuminating me kneeling on the concrete with my hands on my head, beaten and desolate.

A few hours later I was taken back to the unit and put in one of the cells. I felt despair for the opportunity that had escaped me. I had calculated it all well but hadn’t known that there was a hidden camera at the first checkpoint that looked over the bridge, through which they had detected my last movements. They had fucked me. It would be a long time before I had an opportunity like this again.

The director of the prison ordered me into isolation. Once again I had to exercise on the yard alone, which worsened my relationship with the guards. I became bitter, shouting insults at the guards constantly for no real reason. I took out on them all the frustration and helplessness I felt trapped in this absurdity.

One afternoon, while reporting to the sentry to collect a couple of letters, I saw through the glass a Canarian prisoner in the adjoining admissions unit who I knew from prison in Daroca. He had been in charge of cleaning the isolation unit in that prison where he had been shunned by the rest of the prisoners for being a rapist. In his two-faced role as guard and orderly of the unit, he robbed money from those who asked him for something from the shop or sold cigarettes for 100 pesetas each to prisoners who couldn't control their need to smoke, since it was prohibited in isolation. Through all this he was enjoying the impunity offered by the protection of the authorities. Now here he was smiling, enjoying his transfer to a lower grade and acting macho in front of his countrymen, for whom the whole idea of being sent to the first grade prisons of the Peninsula was terrifying. For them this bastard was nothing less than a hero. Back in the cell I decided to teach him a lesson for his nauseating behaviour and to punish what the Administration had rewarded. I made up a metal knife during the night and I wrapped it in a cloth handle.

The following morning I went to see the doctor. Around midday they came to let me out and with the knife hidden in my waist I went to the sentry box. I took a packet of tobacco from my pocket.

"Listen," I said to the guard who was inside, "I want to give this to a friend of mine in the admissions unit."

"Who?"

"The guy who came from Daroca recently, I can't remember his name right now."

"Go on, give it to me," he answered, opening the door.

I pushed inside and took the knife out of my waist, pushing him

into the small metal cabinet.

“Which button opens the door to admissions?”

“That one,” he pointed, frightened.

I pushed it and went inside the unit, carrying the knife in my right hand. I went into the yard and, once I found him, went towards him. The other prisoners parted rapidly and a deathly silence came over the yard.

“What, you don’t recognise me?” I greeted him.

“Hey Che, what are you doing?”

Without saying anything more I advanced on him and stabbed him in the side a few times, not intending to kill him. I wanted to give him a good fright, though. He shouted and went running towards the sentry box from where they transferred him to the infirmary, his new place of refuge. Then I dropped the knife and went back to the cell. Inside I discussed it with the Head Warden who ordered that they take all my belongings away from me.

“You better go quietly, eh?” he threatened me.

“Go fuck yourself, you son of a bitch.”

“The only dog here is you, and it’s rabid.”

“You’re a brave faggot when you’re on the other side of the door...”

A few hours after this happened they came in a group to search the cell I was in. At least that’s the excuse they gave me.

“Tarrío,” they said to me, “we have to search your belongings. We have orders from the Director to handcuff you while you’re outside the cell.”

That said, they opened the door and cuffed me. Once I was chained up, the Head Warden who I had insulted got in my face:

“Not so cocky now, are you?”

After this provocation he followed up with several punches to which I responded with a kick that doubled him over. The rest of the guards jumped on me and joined in the fight, beating me until I was restrained and they dragged me into the next cell. There they

chained me to the bars and gave me a blue jumpsuit and took my clothes. A stream of blood came from my nose to my chin passing over my lips. Naked, I put on the jumpsuit and was handcuffed again. Once alone, I started to walk around the cell. I was overflowing with anger although at heart I knew it had been me who had started it this time with constant insults. The authorities looked on approvingly at these methods, legitimating them in their eyes. They complied with their executioners' tasks, with what—in the end—was their duty. To gang up and fight a man in chains was normal and even heroic to them; to me it was just an abject, cowardly act. From my subjective perspective, I couldn't then see that for them it was cowardly of me to stab an unarmed man, while for me it was right. Who had the truth? In one world we lived completely realities that were completely opposed. Their sense of justice was a thousand light years from my concept of justice; that which they found ethical and moral for me represented a hypocritical farce. I didn't pretend to respect any standards other than those of my anarchy, an anarchy that predestined me for the role of bad guy. For most of my life I had observed, in amazement, how the errors committed in the name of the social majority were just mistakes, but when I committed the same errors, they were called crimes, since they were committed on the margins of society. If a thief was riddled with bullets by a group of police armed to the teeth with the most modern and sophisticated weapons, society and their prostituted media use the term *gunned down*; but if, on the other hand, the fallen one was one of the representatives of the law or an upright citizen, then the term underwent a metamorphosis which transformed it into *murdered*. The right to punish (*ius puniendi*) was exclusive to the State. They could punish and kill in the name of the State, not for revenge or in a moment of rage. In the first case, you were obliged to do so either actively or passively, and in the army you received basic training in how to kill. It didn't matter if you were Christian. In the name of God and country anything was allowed, and you could rape, rob,

assault, plunder left and right, and be a “hero”. Who had perpetrated worse crimes against humanity than the Church or the State? If you’re a rebel, you’re sent to prison: there were innumerable young prisoners jailed for insubordination in the Spanish jails, capable men jailed for trying to keep the peace. In the second case, if you kill or assault someone, you are turned into a despicable criminal, a murderer, which lacks any legitimacy. The system itself justified the crime. It has been justifying it since the first war on earth all the way to those of the modern era. It was done with a double standard, with the two-facedness of the great cynics. No, they were not better than me, or I better than them—less hypocritical, maybe, but not better. We are all animals in evolution and, like it or not, we could be nothing more than that: men who were still partly animal.

I was left for three days in this condition, chained day and night. On the third day, in the face of insistent protests from my companions, they unchained me and gave me my clothes and belongings. In December I would be transferred to Zamora prison for a trial. There a request for a sentence of twenty-nine years in prison awaited me.

Zamora Prison, December 1990

After making the journey from Puerto and stopping at Córdoba prison, I arrived at the old prison. I was exhausted by the long journeys I had been forced to undertake. Inside the compound, in front of the guards’ barracks, there was an automatic coffee vending machine. I was handcuffed together with Antonio Jara, a well-known known escapist, and we stopped in front of the machine, drinking a couple of hot coffees, which worked wonders. Then, carrying our bags as best we could and making several trips, we were brought inside the prison. I was sent to the Tube while the rest of the prisoners went to the main unit. Old memories came to mind. It was not in vain that I had spent a year of my life in these cylindrical punishment cells, stretch after stretch. The cells were the

same; nothing about them had changed, though in the prison things had changed a lot. The guards conducted themselves with great friendliness and respect, which didn't fit with what I had seen them do in the past; they must have felt humiliated at having to act with respect towards the prisoners by orders of the new director. The juveniles had all been transferred to Herrera de La Mancha after several successive riots, and now most of the prisoners in Zamora were older and came from Puerto de Santa María. That was another reason why the guards were taking it easy: it wasn't the same thing to beat and abuse frightened kids as it was to do that to men who had been hardened in the toughest jails in the country. To reach such a relaxed climate, a lot of years had gone by and we had had to suffer a lot of aggression and torture, but the pain had been worth it. Life was much more bearable and there was less suffering.

The following morning I went to the yard with the rest of the prisoners. The unit still contained first graders and I met my friend Santiago Izquierdo Trancho who was locked up there. We met with a strong embrace.

"Hey champ," he greeted me. "How's it going?"

"Good. I've come for the trial for the death. And you, what's up?"

"I'm finishing my time here."

In the unit they had provided a small gym with weights, a punching bag, and some other sports equipment; they had also built a new cafeteria and a TV with a video player as well as a pottery workshop. It was all a luxury compared to what it had been. Now, walking through the room with my friend, the memory came to me of the cold winter mornings that we had spent on this yard without being able to go inside. This definitely seemed like a luxury to me.

"How many years are they asking for?" asked Trancho.

"Twenty-nine years."

"Count on at least twenty."

"Yeah, that's what I expect, more or less."

"I have an escape plan I'm working on with Carlos but we need

a big saw since there are double bars. Can you get us one?"

"No, I only have one and I'm going to use it sometime."

"I understand..."

Trancho's spirit was admirable. He had to his credit a long list of escape attempts, but had never succeeded. He had tried time and again and would always keep trying.

He was a rebel. The ten years in prison, mostly in isolation or closed regime, had not lessened his idealism or his rebelliousness. Like few others, my friend would not become fodder for the prison beast. His attitude inspired me. He introduced me to Carlos Estevez, his companion in this adventure he intended to carry out. Carlos had a physique, and especially a nice-guy face, that would not have led me to guess the cold resolve that lay behind his intellectual's glasses. Years later this slight man organised one of the most spectacular escapes ever to happen in the scope of Spanish or European prisons. For now we greeted each other cordially.

During exercise time I was called for a visit with the social workers. They brought me to an office where they waited for me in their armchairs behind the table.

"Wow!" exclaimed one of them, "you've changed."

I sat down without challenging this stupidity.

"How are you doing, Tarrío?" said the other.

"Very good."

"We called you here," she hurried to tell me, "to know if you need us for anything. Let us know if you want us to call your home or someone in your family to notify them that you're here. You know that contact visits are allowed now."

"I don't need anything from you," I replied in a cutting tone.

"You're very surly, Tarrío," her companion intervened.

"I'm the same as always, just like I was two and a half years ago..."

"Things have changed..."

"Yes, but no thanks to you."

I got up and said goodbye. I had spent a year and a half in

this prison with every type of calamity and they had only come to see me once in the Tube with their cheap whore smiles. Their insincerity was so bad that they weren't even masturbation material, even in prison.

How did we get to this farce? Zamora was something I would never ever forget. I felt full of hatred towards these people, and I was unable to believe them or accept that they would have any good in them. Not after what they had done to me there. They were directly responsible through negligence of their responsibilities, as were the teachers, psychologists, doctors, and the rest of the institutional breed. I claimed my share of the responsibility. In fact, I was there to claim it in years of jail time. They should claim theirs, since they were responsible for setting the hearts of many of us beating with a strong hatred, and filling us with impotence and the desperation from constant abuse and injustice. Several days later, I appeared at the court to claim my responsibility to society. The trial took place in the second section of the Provincial Courthouse. I was strip-searched and transported in a prison van, surrounded by eight national police. The witnesses had already been transported in a separate van and we were kept apart for the whole session. The court was full of police with the fear of an attack against me by the family of the dead man. Gypsy families were noted, among other things, for this type of revenge. In reality they were the only ones who had the legitimate authority for revenge and not this bunch of strangers who gave themselves the right to judge all the crimes of men according to their justice. As we went up the stairs to the courtroom, one of the policemen had some sort of comforting words for me:

“Don't worry man, you're safe with us.”

That's what worried me. If it weren't for the fact that in a few moments they were going to be making deals with the rest of my life I would have found the situation quite funny. Now all that was left was for them to sentence me to twenty years in jail to save my life.

Before going in the courtroom I spoke with my lawyer. I had

told them everything and they had the weapon, so there was no defence to be made. I asked my lawyers for the files and I found myself reading the statements of my companions. Among them I found a statement signed by a prisoner, which also asked the Director of Zamora prison for him not to be called as a witness. I memorised his name and hoped he would be called so I could find out who it was. As for the other witnesses, all was in order: they had behaved phenomenally. In the courtroom they declined to answer questions from the judge or the prosecutor as had previously been agreed to in prison through messages.

At the start of the session they brought me into the court. It was big with a brown wooden floor, and contained many benches in rows upon which rested the greasy asses of several citizens and journalists. I sat down, surrounded by police, in the dock in the front of the court. There, like silent vultures, two magistrates and the judge observed me with the dull eyes of those accustomed to sending men and women to prison as a matter of no importance, as a routine. On my left, the prosecutor organised some papers, immersed in his presentation while my lawyer, to my right, stared at me as if trying to get inside me to see what I was hiding under my serious demeanor. Behind me, a group of photographers tried to capture my image, so that their newspapers could show to society the effectiveness of the courts. I was no more than meat for all these birds of prey.

The trial started with a reading of the accusation. Then the witnesses came filing in. People I did not know, who knew nothing about me, came one by one to the stand and, urged on by the prosecutor, amused themselves by speculating about me. The forensic psychiatrists who had come to interview me in prison months after the event called me violent, introverted, and averse to the principle of authority. They praised my excellent (according to them) memory, emphasising that at twenty years of age I had read and understood perfectly Shakespeare and Nietzsche, which they considered exceptional. These eulogies satisfied my intellectual

ego. The prisoners who had been present at the event refused, as we had agreed, to answer the questions of the prosecutor, despite the urging of the judge. The prosecutor then called the prisoner who had made the statement, and thus handed over my youth and my life to the prison system and to these vultures with their fake titles. He denied involvement in that, and although the prosecutor read his statement out loud, he refused to answer his questions. He became distressed; he must have felt very uncomfortable in front of me. There he was, disgraced and ashamed, feeling my eyes like daggers in his back. When he left the room our eyes met briefly. My visual message was clear: I reserved the right to settle the score. Then it was my turn. In my short answers to the prosecutor's questions, I gave away nothing that I hadn't already stated. This was starting to give me a headache and nausea. Who can guarantee real justice? I was just then a prisoner who, once condemned, would disappear down the drain of the prison sewer, be it right or wrong. Nothing could explain to these idiots that I took responsibility as the author of a settling of accounts that led to an accidental death, but that I believed that there were other social and administrative responsibilities. They would laugh at me. I was the delinquent and therefore lacked any credibility. Men were not equal before the law. How were we equal when the administrators of justice felt they were superior? No one can or should judge another man without first judging himself, and then only in his own name; even then, it would be difficult to be objective, much less just. It didn't matter that the jails encouraged the violence that had brought me to this bench. Though we are all supposedly the same before the law, it wasn't the same to judge a single prisoner and to demand responsibility from the director of prisons and ultimately the Ministry of Justice. Why had we all been brought together again in this prison after the events at Teruel? It was obvious that something would happen, and they did nothing to avoid it because it didn't matter if a group of prisoners killed each other. What does this all amount to? What's

the point of judging me now? In whose name? Society's? To society it doesn't matter that a prisoner was killed; in fact, it would cheer many of them; "one less!" they would bark. What was the point of all this nonsense, if the circumstances that had provoked the event in question continued to be the order of the day inside prison, costing other lives and new useless trials? I knew perfectly well that my sentence was decided beforehand and that this was a farce, a mere formality to legitimate a sentence for homicide. I was amused by the audacity of the prosecutor when he used this witness, knowing full well that it could be the first step in a new crime.

Returning to prison I promised myself not to respect the sentence of any court, denying them any right to judge me. I would not acknowledge them as anything, not even as men, those who send so many humans to prison, without concerning themselves with what happens to them inside these walls, without concerning themselves that inside these walls they violate the rights that they proclaim so often in the exercise of their duties. Until my last ounce of strength I would liberate myself or die trying, but I would never accept confinement, never.

The holidays came. Trancho loaned me his television set for a few days so I could relax in the cell with the curves of the spectacular Marta Sánchez and her large breasts. The Gulf War was building up and Spain, a faithful example of the vilest servility, had sent one of their aircraft carriers and some heroic patriots, pushing vainly to demonstrate solidarity with the bosses of the world. This was full of irony for me. The greatness of peoples, the greatness of much praised international democracies, was measured just like the dictatorships: on their military potential. This was a stupid war that showed us the uselessness of states and nations, the necessity to rebel against those who amused themselves with military proclamations and useless wars. How could society sit back and watch as they threw conscientious objectors into prison (the only heroes of this war) and watch on a

screen as its people, its sons, its fathers, friends, and brothers prepared for the slaughter? What was heroic about this war? Was this society morally sanctioned to judge and condemn my faults? No doubt Marta Sánchez was very caring and brave, daring to go to the Gulf to sing for the Spanish soldiers: just a little effort to raise the morale of these heroes. After all it was Christmas, right?

On the 28th I gathered all my belongings and said goodbye to Trancho. I wished him luck in the escape he was preparing with Carlos, hoping that the two of them would find freedom. I hoped we would meet again, but on the outside. After a preliminary search, I was escorted by two guards to the doors at the entrance to the jail, where the Guardia Civil awaited me. They cuffed and fingerprinted me; I walked my bags to the van and left them in the luggage compartment. Then I got inside, where a pleasant surprise awaited me. Unaware, I sat down in one of the cages.

“Hey José!” called a voice.

“Who’s that?” I cried back.

It was a racket in there from all the different conversations.

“What the fuck, it’s Musta,” he shouted.

“Jesus, where are you?”

“Right here behind you, I think. We can talk to the cops and see if we can sit together, all right?”

“Sure.”

When the last prisoner was brought in, I called the sergeant who was in charge of the cops.

“Hey, guard.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to change cages and travel with my friend who’s in the next one over.”

“Fine, but I want a peaceful trip, all right?”

“Yes, yes it’ll be fine...”

With the van on the move, and with the Guardia Civil at their station, they opened the doors for us and we met in an embrace in

the corridor of the van. We thanked the prisoner who agreed to swap places in the cage so my friend and I could be together. We sat together in the cage and talked in Galician.

“So how are you doing?” I asked him.

“I’m doing good, and you?”

“I’m good too. I was very surprised to hear about your arrest with the other two. What happened?”

“We made a lot of mistakes. The sin of inexperience, man, and also I can’t stop thinking about the opportunity I had. I feel bad for you because you were waiting for us.”

“Don’t worry, we have time and desires, and that’s what is important now. We have to fix these mistakes and the rest will come by itself,” I encouraged him. “I’m really happy to see you, even though this wasn’t the meeting we planned.”

“Where are you going?” he asked me.

“I’m going to Tenerife 2. I’ve already been there. I tried an escape that didn’t work out but I’m going to try something else when I get there.”

“Be careful.”

“I will. Where are they taking you?”

“I’m going to a trial in Zaragoza.”

We established a system of communication so as not to lose contact. It was important to stay united and inform each other of our transfers or other situations that might arise. The journey was easier when you felt the presence of true friends at your side, of people who love you without reservations. They, together with my mother and brothers, were my only true family. It had always been this way. They were the ones who accompanied me inside, in the boarding school, the reformatory, and now in prison. They were the only ones who would support me unconditionally to the end or who would pick up a weapon to defend me or free me.

They had switched the transfer jail from Carabanchel to Alcalá-Meco and so the prison van stopped in front of the latter. Once

inside they separated us. Even though both of us were to be held in closed regime, we were destined for different units. They took me to a cell with Antonio Jara, while my friend went to unit six. We were to be transported on the same day so we would see each other again in three days.

Once inside, Antonio got some joints from some contacts of his. He also got a bag with different tasty French cheeses, which we stuffed ourselves with. We fell into the two beds that were in the cell and we smoked some joints. Antonio Jara was a known bank robber and had to his credit one of the biggest criminal records in the country. He knew several countries and had escaped from Spanish prisons four times. He was a total bandit. I liked to listen to him talk.

“Believe me José, forty is the best age for a man.”

“And why is that?” I asked him.

“Because you have experience and maturity, and you’ve stopped making the mistakes you did when you were younger but you can still get it up.”

“When you’re free, right?”

“This year I want to go to Brazil,” he said, convincingly.

“Let’s see how lucky we are; we need some luck.”

“How old are you, José?”

“Twenty-two.”

“Keep trying it with all the strength you can find,” he pronounced.

These words would prove to be prophetic: one of us would manage to escape next year. But for now these were just the dreams, projects, and hopes with which we greeted 1991.

We rang in the New Year with another dose of weed. They gave us what was supposedly a Christmas dinner, and twelve grapes in such a bad state that we couldn’t eat them. We finished off the French cheese and we greedily ate some cupcakes from the shop while we sat talking on the table. Afterwards, we prepared our gear for the journey, which we would go on the next day, three days after coming to Alcalá-Meco.

In the American cells in intake I met again with Musta, and also with Garfia. We greeted each other and I talked with my friend through the bars.

“Keep in touch, okay?”

“Sure, don’t doubt it. I’ll send those letters you gave me.”

“Don’t forget to talk to Yanko and the others,” I reminded him.

“And you to Alba.”

“It’s done.”

Juanjo, who was talking excitedly with Jara, Titi, and Isidro, all known escapists, came towards the grate through which I was talking to Musta.

“How are you for cash?”

“Dead broke.”

He took out his wallet and took out 2000 pesetas and passed it to me. He also gave me some packs of tobacco. These exchanges of favours, unconditional help, were very common among us jail breakers. There existed a great co-operation and solidarity since we all knew the necessity of helping each other, which kept us together in a tight circle.

“Good luck, José,” he said.

“Thanks, take care of yourself, okay?”

I gave half of the tobacco and money to my friend, throwing it to him through the bars. Once the transport van to Cádiz arrived I was called, along with some other inmates, by the Guardia Civil to get into the van. The mere idea of getting into those cages again made my stomach turn. I got my bags and belongings and I took leave of Juanjo with a firm handshake. Then I walked to the cell where Musta was being held, and gripping his hand strongly, I said goodbye to him.

“You know that I love you?” I asked him.

“I know brother, I love you too...”

After this outburst of sentimentality I walked towards the van. I put the bags in the luggage compartment and once everyone was

inside the cages we set course for Andalucía on the Nacional IV.

I had managed to be alone in one of the cages; at least it would be less miserable. The drives were still terrible. To save a few pennies the Administration and society continued to treat us like cattle.

Puerto de Santa María Prison 2, January 1991

On arrival at Puerto de Santa María I was transferred, to my surprise, to the remand prison adjacent to both the main prison and the women's section. The prisons were separated by a road, through which the transport vans delivered more meat for the prison. Once inside Puerto 2, after a humiliating search during which I had to pick up and show my testicles to the jailer, I was taken to the isolation unit, where there were several political prisoners from the Basque group ETA. I met Paco and José Mari, with whom I started a good relationship, along with the rest of the political prisoners who received me marvellously, sharing everything with me from the first moment. I would be here until my transportation to Tenerife could be arranged, a time that was very enjoyable. These men, considered by most Spaniards, if not Basques, as bloody killers, took me in and showed me the practice and meaning of the word *solidarity* in every manner. Their money became my money, their books were my books, and their food was my food. They shared extraordinary things with me, like honey infusions for the nights—which they sent me through the window on strings. José Mari, for his part, showed me how to keep a balanced diet, lending me some books and giving me a present of a little earpiece radio. He was fascinated with beekeeping and gave me extensive talks on the benefits of bees for the countryside and crops. He was a born naturalist. We had enough in common that it was easy for us to become friends.

In the same wing as us was Paco, a very likeable revolutionary, who often loaned me his electronic chess set, or used it to inflict serious and scandalous beatings on me. We spent whole afternoons

playing against each other through the windows. I never managed to beat Paco, and it wasn't because I was playing badly. I felt good among these companions, really good. They shared things like fruit and bee pollen with me, so I could supplement the disgusting prison food. When the doctors in the prison refused to give me a dietary supplement, these prisoners shared theirs with me, concerned for my health. We were taken out to a small yard where we gathered with their other companions from the opposite wing. We talked to them by shouting through the windows when we felt like some fun, although they spoke of private things in Basque. I normally walked with Paco and José Mari, since they were the ones I trusted most. We connected through our confrontations with the Spanish state, though it was for different reasons.

One afternoon we got a visit from several inspectors from the Director General's office in Madrid. They opened each cell and interviewed the prisoners. They came to the cell I was in, opened it up, and came towards me smiling.

"How's it going?" asked one of them.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"We are here to inspect the prison. Do you have any complaints to register?" Several guards and the Head Warden accompanied them.

"Yes, in fact. Have you been told that a few days ago several guards beat a prisoner in the next unit? That's what I want to complain about, now you have a matter to fix. But," I added, "I don't believe you have any ability to solve anything, nor would you even try to."

"Good, we will have to investigate first. Anything else?"

"No."

We parted ways coldly. They wouldn't do anything; it was the same thing repeated thousands of times in different Spanish prisons. Pure and unadulterated professional hypocrisy to justify undeserved salaries and an inefficient administration. So much so, that a year later, the director of this prison and other important prison officials were discovered as the organisers of a fraud to pay off a series of personal

debts with money from prisoners' accounts. Once the fraud (which also affected the prison in Ciudad Real) was discovered, the director in question was dismissed but continued to occupy another position in the administration of Puerto 1 (as assistant director). This goes to show the high level of corruption in Spanish prisons. These inspectors either came now to play their part in sweeping the scene clean, or were simply incompetent buffoons in their role as supervisors. In any case, in the prisons, all these people protected one another through cronyism, and because none of them could be sure the same thing wouldn't happen to them tomorrow. They could do their crimes without fear, since, if they were discovered, they *might* be dismissed from their position, but they would be able to secure another inside a different prison once the scandal passed. This reality won, for them, over public opinion. The walls of the prison, besides keeping us locked up, served above all so that nobody could see what happened behind them. That is how the Administration operated under Antoni Asunción, an Administration created in his image and likeness.

We continued on after this obnoxious visit with our daily routine. Sometimes Paco and I would go out, armed with plastic knives, sit on the ground, and peel some fruit that we would then cut in pieces and cover in honey, pollen, and orange juice, and share it among everyone. Other times we sat in the yard for our two daily hours and drank coffee or tea that we got from the cafeteria. We talked about my transfer:

"It looks like you're not going, eh José?"

"It doesn't seem like it. Something's going on..."

"How is Tenerife?" asked José Mari.

"Good, we'll see if I succeed this time."

"You don't know how many times I've heard that," he smiled.
"Everyone says that when the new year comes around..."

"I see your point but don't jinx me, man..." I answered seriously, making all of us laugh.

Despite the care of my companions I started to feel bad again.

I sweated a lot during the night and small fevers provoked chills that stopped me from sleeping. The symptoms of asphyxia returned violently and I had to turn on the lights and open the windows, hoping it would stop. I didn't talk to the doctors because I didn't have any time for those pigs. The next day I talked about it with Paco, without telling him the whole truth:

"I'm having bad nights and feeling very anxious. I have a terrible time sleeping."

"Well, I have some Sophrology tapes in the cell that were sent to me to help me practice relaxation. If you want I'll dub you some so that you have them and can practice."

"That'd be phenomenal, Paco."

"Good, I'll do that."

Sophrology consisted of yoga techniques mixed with self-hypnosis. It helped the body sleep by means of deep breathing, and gradually relaxing the muscles of the body, beginning at the feet and ending at the head. You tensed the muscles and then relaxed them slowly until you succeeded in not feeling them. This helped me a lot, as long as I practiced it often. The effects were amazing. On the other hand, I had gotten an outbreak of acne on my back and chest that was very aggressive and which festered constantly, covering the t-shirt I wore with pus and blood. This was caused by the bad diet and too much fat in the prison food. At least that's what I thought was happening. Whatever it was, it annoyed me a lot, but I could do nothing about it but try to keep it from getting worse and try to let it heal.

On 20 February I was told of my transfer to the prison in Zaragoza. They were bringing me there for a trial, so my transfer to Tenerife was suspended. The guys collected what little they had and offered me some money for the trip, which I accepted. From these men I took away good memories and above all a lot of valuable advice.

Zaragoza Prison, February 1991

From Madrid, several prisoners took the trip to Zaragoza. During

the trip the Guardia Civil refused to open the doors; so we were not able to move around a bit or use the toilet. So a companion whose cage was open broke the handle off the other cells one by one until we were all out. The Guardia Civil threatened to come in, but it was only to intimidate us, and they didn't dare. We got our way. We spent the rest of the journey with the cages open, chatting in groups. Around midday we arrived at our destination and we got out of the van in pairs. We gathered our belongings and went inside through an electronic door under the supervision of the Guardia Civil. Once inside, one of the cops reported me to the guards.

"This one," he said pointing at me, "has a piece of metal which he broke off one of the doors. He opened all the cage doors during the trip with it."

"Let's see, where's the metal?" asked the Head Warden.

"I don't have anything."

"We'll see. Take them to the Americans," he ordered his subordinates.

They took us to the American cells, where we were locked up. A little while later they came to take my companions to the unit and left me there alone. The prisoner who had taken the steel from the door and opened up for us didn't take any responsibility. He came from the second grade and wanted to protect this position above all. I couldn't blame him for that, since he was looking out for his own interests. He had taken a risk in opening all of our cages and it was up to me to answer his gesture with silence. After all, the cop had confused me with him because of the clothes we were wearing and this wasn't his fault. The fault of this situation lay with the Guardia Civil who looked for revenge by complaining about me.

After a while they brought me a plastic bucket and some blankets.

"When you want to come out of there, give us the steel."

"I tell you again I don't have anything."

"So whom did you give it to?"

"I threw it through the toilet hole into the street before we

arrived.”

“Fine, if that’s what happened you won’t have a problem looking for it,” he said pointing at the bucket.

“No way...”

This was an uncomfortable situation. I had a saw inside me, which was dangerous now. They weren’t going to believe me about the stupid metal piece, whatever I said. I looked at the bucket with despair for what it meant. If they wanted to wait until I shit, and give them something, they might as well sit down because I was in no hurry. I lay down on the dirty blankets, ready to resist there for however long I needed to. I wouldn’t give them anything and much less the pleasure of making me shit in this bucket. I spent the night as best I could without eating. The following morning they didn’t give me any breakfast. A guard came to see me.

“What, you don’t shit?”

“Why, are you hungry or what?” I responded sarcastically.

“What...?”

“Nothing man, nothing.”

“It seems like we might have to get the gloves.”

They gave me nothing to eat and around mid-day the Head Warden came to see me accompanied by other guards. He talked to me through the bars.

“Well, Tarrío, are you going to give us the metal piece or what?” he threatened.

“I told you already, I don’t have the steel. I threw it away...”

They opened the door and came inside.

“Strip,” they ordered.

I obeyed and took off my clothes. They looked between my ass cheeks, under my armpits, under my testicles and all the spaces of my body. I felt as if a bunch of slugs were sliding over my skin, but I contained myself. Once I was searched, they left me in peace, and, after I dressed, with a deep blow to my self-esteem, they transferred me to the isolation unit. I had won the game and saved the saw.

They locked me in one of the isolation cells. These were individual punishment cells, clean and roomy, with double-barred windows that looked out onto the street. I was in the second storey of the unit. I looked out the window. This little piece of street, this span of physical freedom, produced nostalgia in me for other times, dead and gone, but now resurrected in my memory.

My heart skipped a beat. What happened? What was happening to me? What was I turning into or what were they turning me into? This slice of life, these citizens passing indifferently on the street, these cars driving by, all reminded me that I was a dead man, a jailed man buried alive in a world of concrete, populated by steel bars. A world of misery where life was escaping from me bit by bit, while the shameless eye of the jailer scrutinised the inside of the tomb to make sure I was still there. It was difficult to accept that years passed by without you. It was difficult to accept that people disappeared or were forgetting you, when being forgotten was a form of death. It was just difficult to live in a grave, fed only by hope and memories. Now, looking out the window, contemplating the street, I understood the depth of the abyss into which I had been thrown by man; behind walls, robbed of nature and time, a human no longer living but only surviving.

That afternoon I went to the yard with Tofi, an old companion from Daroca prison and one who, like myself, was subjected to a closed regime. We greeted each other with a handshake and walked around the yard underneath the voracious eye of the guard who watched us from his box, his lair.

“How are you doing, Tofi?”

“Good.”

“You won’t believe what happened yesterday on account of a fucking pig. I’ve been in the Americans till now.”

“I know, some guys were talking about it.”

“Do you know anything about Niño?” I asked him.

“He is still in Herrera, although he was in hospital in Madrid

recently for some illness. But now he's doing fine..."

"I heard he's taking charge of APRE and wants to reform it with new statutes."

"Yes, there have been various copies distributed through the prisons. We'll see how people react. You didn't get one?"

"No, I've spent a few months being bounced around."

"I have a copy upstairs in a folder. I'll give it to you later so you can read it."

"All right."

I asked around for my friend Musta but he wasn't there any more. They had moved him to Galicia again. After a few hours of walking and a good shower, we were once again swallowed up by the cells. I cleaned the one I occupied and made the bed, and then lay on my back to read the statutes of the reconstituted APRE, written up by Ávila Navas. There were three photocopied documents and their contents were very interesting.

Statutes of the Association of Special Regime Prisoners (Reconstituted)

There can be no doubt that disinterest and lack of social conscience for prison issues gives carte blanche to the torture, abuse, arrogance, and crimes that are the methods of those who implement the penal policies. This is what brings about APRE(r).

The reality of prison is only known to those who suffer it: we, the prisoners. Unfortunately, the prison population is divided into two types of prisoners: the conventional ones whose sole objective is to end their confinement in the shortest time possible in conditions as comfortable as possible, and us, APRE(r), the so-called uncontrollables. We accept this label, since we are unquestionably aware of our condition as human beings, and our objective is to serve our sentences refusing comfortable regimes in defence of our dignity and the rights that the laws grant us. APRE(r) has gone through two stages. In the first phase the only gain was a symbolic

representation that bettered some of our living conditions; with this came disappointment, resentment, and inconsistencies in the face of new projects, leaving the association to fall apart.

But with the house in ruins, and a new base of members, the association reconstructed itself, creating a structure of independent groups whose activity aims at the goal of stopping and eradicating the mistreatment, and the gaining of minimally dignified living conditions in prisons through the promotion of culture, creativity, sport or any other activity with educational purposes.

We fight for the dismantling of the special regime Article 10 of the LOGP and articles 32 and 36 of the Penal Regulations. These articles were aimed at the implementation of total vegetative isolation and the erasing of the prisoners' personalities. We suffer from a total restriction of fundamental rights by the imposition of a repressive regime that is subject to no laws or rules and is applied to silence all our protests and avoid retaliatory actions. Besides being held incommunicado and in isolation, we are kept hundreds of kilometres from our families, so that they are exposed to the possibility of fatal traffic accidents on the highways.

We believe that in a democracy not everything is valid. Democracy is not the inheritance of a few who—in their wisdom and understanding—degrade it, putting their arbitrary views into practice through a divine right of caste and status, administered by those who hold public office. We are fed up with our basic rights being violated by the pimps of democracy, who seek to turn their “fellow citizens” into prostitutes for the rule of law.

For the last decade, as a consequence of the inconsistencies and deficiencies in the actions of the socialist government, it has come about that we, the prisoners, are constantly and systematically made to be easy victims of physical aggression, of abuses of power, and arbitrariness on the part of some guards. Guards who are professionally trained in the strictest fascist-Catholic tradition predominant in the military regime, which preceded democracy until fifteen years ago.

Consciously or not, the Administration keeps these secular elements of Francoism active in official positions in the penitentiary system. Some of them, practising the opportunistic politics of their respective positions, have risen through the administration ranks, and, with malice, have imposed inquisitorial directives, feeding, in their own hegemonic way, the principles of security and order according to which penitentiary institutions are to be run, making these institutions into their own feudal domains (principally through the physical violence practised by its assassins, who turn the prisons into their own feudal domains through terror, intimidation, and blackmail). To comply, the legal rights of prisoners are violated with ease. The beatings still continue, for such acts as talking through a window or lying on a bed; due to them, our bodies know a lot about flinching (from so much institutionalised aggression).

That is why we have had disciplinary sanctions imposed on us through lies and set-ups, and have had to answer to corrupt groups of administrators, mostly composed of torturers: the same people who prescribe batons, shackles, and pepper spray are the ones who decide our classification in prison.

We cannot determine exactly the number of companions who have perished in the hellish third-world penal system, owing to having been intentionally infected with AIDS, or those who died from a lack of adequate and reliable medical attention, not to mention the absence of a humanitarian spirit in the heart of the State. We remember our companions José Manuel Ruiz Verdugo, Francisco Carmona Gallardo, Ramón Cervera Carranza, Juan José Piquero, Agustín Rueda Sierra (by torture), Vicente Gigante Real... There have been so many deaths that we would need a paper factory to print all the names of our unforgettable companions.

We have made thousands of complaints, directed at the judges and the DGIP, informing them of the physical, mental, and moral aggression we are subjected to, but still no action has been taken to eradicate this regime.

Instead, the immediate result of our protests has been an increase in repression and hostility on the part of the torturers.

The continued state of absolute indifference that we suffer, and the desperation which it brings us, has caused us on several occasions to start riots and to kidnap officials. These deeds have not only increased the length of our sentences, but these demonstrations of refusal have also given free reign to the torturers to turn their vulgar passions and sadistic natures upon us. We have been and are guinea pigs in the field of psychological torture, which is aimed at annulling the personality of the individual.

We are not deceiving ourselves. At all times and with precision, the DGIP has known of the beatings and arbitrary punishments that are inflicted on us, without ever stopping them or dismissing those who commit these acts. On the other hand, we get hammered down; if the results obtained with physical and emotional punishment don't satisfy them, they blackmail us and play with our pain. They traffic in our emotions, take us far from our families and loved ones, consciously and methodically apply geographic isolation for social uprooting, and offer no justification or reasons for the rejection of parole. This is because *social integration no longer exists except as an abstract term, and what is practised on us is training in slavery*, taught by organised crime gangs in Treatment Teams, whose therapeutic criteria is the attainment of absolute submission in the prisoner towards the dominant class.

Without any doubt, we hold the Administration ultimately responsible for the grievances we have suffered and continue to suffer. We consider that the beatings we have received, the time in punishment cells, the years in isolation, the spiritual wounds that have been inflicted on us and our families cannot be repaired by any monetary settlement.

Since this State of Rights still allows us to read, we understand what lies in the provisions of Art. 121 of the Spanish Constitution.

We demand compensation for the grievances we have suffered

in the following way:

1. *Reduced sentences, day for day, plus four months for each year served, to be implemented retroactively.*
2. *Investigation to clarify responsibility for the causes of disciplinary sanctions that we have been subjected to, in relation to the obvious violation of Art. 15 of the Spanish Constitution and in connection with Art. 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.*
3. *Immediate release of all prisoners with terminal illnesses (AIDS), removing the requirement that they be in terminal phase of the illness; the rights established in Article 60 of the prison regulations should be granted to inmates in medium phase of their illness.*
4. *That all prison officers reported for mistreatment be removed from contact with prisoners.*

We know that the DGIP is developing a prison policy in which correct treatment will dominate the prisoner's regime; the task of re-education has come about through popular will on the penal establishment, something we consider a positive thing. If the prison regulations had been applied according to the letter of the law, most of the members of APRE(r) would have already finished serving our sentences (or a large part of them), benefiting from the progression of grades and parole; however, the reality that is imposed on us will not even allow us contact visits, which amounts to the prohibition of engaging in sexual conduct (a form of torture) or hugging our families. We know a lot of prisoners with notable sentences or longer ones than ours—drug traffickers, ex-policemen, rapists, extreme right wing terrorists—who hold paid positions, are granted extraordinary pardons, home visits, and who live well in prison. Those whose particular offences are to attack the freedom and rights of the Spanish nation (such as those who took part in the coup of 23rd February) have been the beneficiaries of the generosity of democracy; we have also seen the immunity and impunity that some of them enjoy. For example, there has still been no responsibility

taken by anyone for the deaths in prison in Foncalent in January 1987 of the prisoners Elena Márquez Vaño, Isabel Plano Pérez, and Teresa Pedraza González, although it has been publicly accepted that there were anomalies, and therefore that someone is responsible. We could spend a century naming the GAL case, the Nani case, the Agustín Rueda case, and high ranking officials, FSE members and magistrates, implicated in drug-trafficking and falsification of official documents, dubious donations to political parties, and a long et cetera of other shameless acts that happen every day in a supposedly constitutional and democratic country. These *gentlemen* will never know the inside of a punishment cell. We, dear comrades, are easy victims of the flood of drugs in the country. We are for the most part circumstantial delinquents and addicts. Instead of curing us they have thrown us into jails, the final objective of which is the eradication of culture and the fostering of drug use. We are given astronomical sentences and totally disproportionate punishments for belonging to a lower social class. It is sad, but to the disgrace of this country, democracy only exists for a few, while so many of us rot in punishment cells for having the courage to reclaim our rights. A large majority of us have contracted AIDS, and they prohibit us from spending the rest of our days with our families.

For all that, with a social conscience and a fighting spirit that characterises and identifies us, and with growing moral and material support on the outside, we have a just cause and we will continue to protest abuses to the SGAP in the following ways: any member of APRE(r) has moral legitimacy. We will continue to make our complaints, collective or individual, in duplicate. All of them are under the banner of APRE(r). In these we will show the rights that they deny us, request contact visits, protest the application of unnecessary force in the units; the prohibition against using classrooms and other units to develop cultural, sporting, recreational activities, etc.; the lack and lateness of medical check-ups and tests; the refusal of the prison doctors to make the requests of Art. 60;

the absence of medical teams for observation and treatment, or some aspect of these, or the disinterest in attaining them; the lack of meetings and psychiatric tests, the disinterest in the teaching units and the refusal to teach classes to any inmates in the first grade—in short, everything that we consider unjust or illegal. In every Centre there will be a committee to file complaints and gather signatures, including those of sympathisers. A copy should be sent to the SGAP and another should stay with the committee until it reaches its destination. These should always be sealed, registered, and signed for at the receiver's end. The financing of this new APRE(r) will not be a problem. The question is to expand the support we have on the outside, so that our lawyers can secure our rights and we can obtain suitable compensation.

We are not advocating violence, but we do not put aside collective armed actions if we are still denied what we deserve after all legal avenues are exhausted.

We are aware that, although it might be in accordance with the established political order, we are not ethically permitted to use violence as a means to our ends. We do not justify our means (a maxim of Machiavelli's), but, when in the most obscure and clandestine ways we are massacred, it is an instinct to maintain a legitimate defence of our right to life and to physical and moral integrity, which is why we say:

*Enough!!! Let's practice the doctrine
of Zeno and always obey our own reason
Courage, comrades!!!
Justice and Democracy for all*

Coordinator Fco. Javier Ávila Navas
Herrera de la Mancha,
January 1991

A copy of this had been sent to the Secretary General of the Penitentiary Institutions, Antoni Asunción, who simply dismissed

its contents. What harm could these imprisoned men cause him, the big chief at the height of his power and ambition? Because Asunción was one of the most ambitious men of the PSOE he would not stop at anything. This had been clearly demonstrated during the hunger strike of the GRAPO prisoners between 1989 and 1990, in which the prisoner José Manuel Sevileno died from starvation and other members of the group suffered serious internal injuries (such as Sebastian Rodriguez Veloso, now in a wheelchair). Asunción was the master and the prisoners were his slaves; if they dared to rebel they would be reprimanded without a thought, as always. The law, power, and the media were in his favour. Why would he fear a group of prisoners? They wouldn't dare...

The news on the radio caught me by surprise on February 25th. Garfia, José Campillo, Antonio Vázquez and José Romera Chuliá succeeded in escaping from a van that was transporting them through the outskirts of Valladolid. I felt a huge joy for all of them; they now tasted the rewards of their bravery, a much-deserved prize reserved only for the most daring. I especially felt it for my friend Juanjo: he had succeeded, he was free. After being taken from the prison of Alcalá-Meco that morning and seeing that the floor of the van was deteriorating, Juanjo, Campillo, Chuliá (known as *el Francés*) and Vázquez agreed to escape. They opened a hole in the metal plate of the floor using the leg of one of the chairs as a crowbar and made a passage down into the luggage compartment, into which they slid. The rest of the prisoners didn't leave despite the offer (when more people leave it's better for all at the moment of running). With the door of the luggage compartment partly open, they prepared to leave. They would have to wait until the van slowed down as it arrived in the city. They knew this and waited. In the outskirts of Valladolid the van slowed down and on a curve they all jumped out and started running, to the shock of the Guardia Civil. From the escort, two unarmed cops got out, one of whom, Julián Botella

Nevado, caught up to José Romera Chuliá and tackled him onto the ground. Salvador Gutiérrez, the younger of the two, had less luck and even though he reached Garfia, he was punched to the ground, falling in the road and giving up the chase. For their part, José Campillo and Antonio Vázquez got away without any problem. The escape had been carried out successfully, save for Romero Chuliá who would have to wait for another opportunity to try again.

At the beginning of March, I was up in court for a small crime of disrespecting authority. I had sent a death threat to a judge from prison, demanding a revolutionary fine of three million pesetas. They wanted to jail me for three more years. I was driven under heavy security to the judge. He asked why I had made the threats. I responded that I hated the judicial system. They sentenced me to another three years.

In prison I found myself neighbours with Tofi, both of us facing the prison grounds. From there we could see the street, in front of us was the administration offices and the open section, the place where Ropera Chuliá had escaped from a year before. At one side was the director's house. At night we stuck our heads out the windows and talked. Sometimes my companion besieged the director, insulting him with shouts from the jail.

"Bastard! I know you can hear me. Let's improve the food in here, eh?"

Then the Guardia Civil from the sentry would intervene.

"Shut your mouth!"

"Fuck you, asshole!"

These situations had us in fits of laughter. Tofi was very lively, an excellent companion, and the days that I spent there with him were very enjoyable. Some nights the attacks of tachycardia returned and would call him by beating on the cell wall so that he could bang his door if things got worse. When I felt better, I'd lie down again, always at dawn. Although I was getting used to the attacks, it was hard to suffer them inside a cell, alone; it was a little easier with a companion

at your side, watching out for you, ready to attract attention if things worsened. When it existed, companionship between prisoners was something admirable which never failed to amaze. Without doubt it was something beautiful and uplifting.

The final outcome of the trial in Zamora was a sentence of eighteen years in prison. This decision finally broke every strand left tying me to society. Through its institutions, it had taken it upon itself to make me completely disappear from its world. This was how the system worked. They pursue you, they capture you, they count all your errors, and, when you least expect it they threw you in a dungeon. They had me. At least that's what they thought. Now they would go after someone else. This went for all the men and women who would not accept the system of a happy democratic world.

On the morning of March 18th, Javier Ávila Navas and his comrades crossed the line from theory into action. The news travelled the whole country over the airwaves and television, all the way to the prison at Herrera de la Mancha: a group of prisoners had taken several hostages and barricaded themselves inside the special unit. It had all happened that morning, while the doctor was consulting the prisoners in their cells. Normally grilles prevented contact but one of them had been broken and open, leaving only a wire to avoid detection by the guards. Once the guards were in the cell of Ávila Navas, he jumped on them armed with a knife and captured them, putting them in a cell. He took the keys and opened the doors of his two companions in the unit, Rivas Dávila and Losa López. Outside, in the yard, Sánchez Montañés and Laudelino Iglesias had taken control, overpowering two other guards. After entering the secure zone they trapped a guard and a Guardia Civil corporal. The alarm sounded. Dismissing the idea of escape, the prisoners threw up barricades in the corridors of the unit with mattresses and gates from the doors of the cells, preparing Molotov cocktails to set the unit on fire in case of assault. The four hostages—three guards and

the doctor—were taken into different cells and moved frequently to avoid their location becoming known to the special forces (who would not be long in coming). These prisoners were ready to fight to the finish. On the other side, the Guardia Civil advanced deep inside the prison and took up positions at the special unit, surrounding it. The game began. From then on, it was a question of temper. It was as if a rope were being pulled in a tug of war between the two sides, without any middle; whoever gave a millimetre would lose.

The negotiations began. They were carried out *in situ* through the barricades. The Administration had sent three inspectors to negotiate from the Directorate General of Madrid and the JVP, as demanded by the entrenched prisoners. Representing them, Ávila Navas read out loud the list of grievances that had caused this event:

1. *An end to physical and verbal abuse in prisons.*
2. *Immediate dismissal of the prison guards in Alcalá-Meco who urged upon us the formation of a group to assassinate the most influential political prisoners in return for better conditions.*
3. *Appropriately renovate the Penitentiary Youth Centre in Madrid where the female prisoners from Yeserías have been transferred.*
4. *End the torture, beatings, and mistreatment in the psychiatric centre in Alicante (Foncalent) in the acute unit, where inmates are tied up for months at a time, forcing them to perform their necessary physical duties on themselves, with no access to their belongings, under the supervision of the head doctor Mari Ángeles López.*
5. *Proper investigation and finding of responsibility for the hangings that have occurred in State prisons due to the intentional neglect of guards who have also bribed other prisoners with privileges in exchange for not aiding investigations into these murders. Investigate complaints about intentional AIDS infections due to redistribution of dirty razors without any health and safety controls.*
6. *Immediate release of all prisoners with terminal illnesses, in accordance with Art. 60 of the Prison Regulations.*
7. *That Art. 60 be applied to AIDS prisoners when the virus is in a*

median phase, and not only when they are corpses as has been the case for the last year, ordered by the state prosecutor Leopoldo Torres. We have taken note of his lack of humanitarian spirit.

8. *Immediate suspension of Art. 10 of the Prison Rules, firstly to prevent new victims and secondly for those already sentenced, who spend years and years in first grade, first level conditions, twenty-two hours a day in a cell, when it is well known that isolation generates violence.*
9. *That isolation sentences not have a maximum of forty-two days; fourteen is enough of a barbarity. All that follows is that the prisoners become accustomed to the punishment.*
10. *That our present government cease bothering about circumstantial delinquents (addicts), who are victims of the flood of drugs into the country, and take into account the illness and all the social dimensions of the problem. The sick should not be condemned, but cured.*
11. *That prison policy be progressive not only theory and for public image. That reintegration be not just an abstract term but should ensure the lives and physical integrity of prisoners, with respect for their ideals. That the social background of the prisoners also be taken into account, so that they can serve their sentences in prisons near their homes.*
12. *That the right to culture and sport is respected and that more activities be facilitated, as well as paid work.*
13. *That the buying of items from the shop not be prohibited for those under sanctions.*
14. *That the relatives of prisoners be treated with respect when they enter into the prisons.*
15. *That the reform of the Penal Code include the possibility of release for prisoners who have served more than five years.*
16. *That, during the carrying out of disciplinary orders, the prisoners can have access to witnesses, lawyers, and attorneys, so that we are not undefended in front of corrupt internal committees. The jailers act as judge and executioner, and the sanctions mean days in jail added*

on to our sentences. *Undefined prosecutions violate the Spanish Constitution in Arts. 24 and 119.*

17. *That the “progressive” prison system be more generous with the “uncontrollable” prisoners, who simply ask for justice, and that its generosity not be exhausted on extreme right-wing terrorists or drug traffickers.*
18. *That we are not judged for past hostage takings, which were always incited by the malfunctioning of the Justice system.*

The Administration, once it learned of the demands of the prisoners, did not make them public. Its directive was to hide at any cost, including human life, these extreme protests about prison conditions in the Spanish State. Society would not be allowed to know the reality of this underworld where the dictatorship continued on its course. It ordered a course of action of disinformation through the media. The most important newspapers, with the exception of *Egin*, and some radio programs, wasted neither time nor adjectives in branding the prisoners as irresponsible, dangerous madmen. None of these informative bastards would clarify that the Special Regime that these men had been subjected to was illegal and had been repealed by the Royal Decree 787/84. It was the same farce as always. They did not respect the law, but if someone who was not part of the State infringed upon it, they must be insane or fascist. Hypocrisy, irrationality, delirium. The irresponsibility and prostitution of the media was simply repugnant and disgusting.

There was no talk of Herrera de la Mancha, sadly famous for the torture and abuse committed there against the COPEL prisoners in the years 1979-81, when prisoners were taken from the cells at night in handcuffs, and, with absolute impunity of the torturers, beaten terribly with the aim of making them confess to old crimes or to inform on their comrades. More recently the ETA prisoners in events recorded in the book *Herrera, Prison of War*.¹ No. Why tell

1 Anjel Rekalde, *Herrera. Prisión de Guerra*. Txalaparta: Tafalla, 1990.

the truth to the citizens so they could decide for themselves if it was good or bad? How could the media and the State maintain the idea that these subversive men were dangerous, heartless psychopaths, if this list of the eighteen points were made public, with the tremendous human evidence of solidarity that glowed from each and every word? How could the State then justify that such acts of solidarity be subject to such extreme repression and denial? From among this pile of lies aimed at society from the “democratic” media, the tension was mounting on the prison issue. The Special Intervention Units of the Guardia Civil took up positions and prepared to intervene. The prisoners continued to use their bargaining chip (the doctor). It was unlikely that the Guardia Civil would come inside with her in the unit, since she was pregnant and that would make the assault more complicated. The police did not want to be responsible for a possible miscarriage or risk that the wild beasts who had her would execute her.

But the reality was very different, and inside the special unit they began to discuss the idea of releasing her. It was a very complicated decision, since the possibility of an assault was 99 per cent if they let her go. But her pregnancy gave serious doubt to the legitimacy of kidnapping this woman, as it involved another innocent being, and so her release was arranged, and with that the probability of an assault became a certainty. In fact, this humanitarian gesture, decided in a moment of weakness, would give the green light to the assault forces coming in hours later. Once the doctor was freed, the rest of the hostages were almost worthless, and would be trampled over, with little regard for their lives. This was how the Administration thought and acted.

At dawn on the 19th, about three o'clock, it started. The assault forces received orders to put an end to the kidnapping and they invaded. They started to set off explosive charges and machine gun fire rang out. It all happened quickly. The prisoners were located along with the hostages and tackled, then beaten savagely with

baseball bats. This was a standard procedure in these assaults, intended to terrorise the rest of the prisoners. It all culminated with three prisoners being taken to hospital, the re-imprisonment of the other two and the release of the hostages. The assault silenced the demands that had not been made public. The Administration could relax.

However the young prisoners of Herrera de la Mancha, recently transferred from Zamora, who knew what had happened, took the initiative the next day with a new riot. Groups of prisoners took to the roofs in support of the prisoners beaten in the Special Regime. The revolt only lasted a couple of hours before the Guardia Civil intervened in a fierce assault against the youth who, once beaten, were taken bleeding back to their cells. These events were no more than a foretelling of events to come, which united these brave men who were not indifferent to injustice in bonds of solidarity.

My trial in Zaragoza was finished, so they notified me that I was to be taken back to the Tenerife 2 prison. I was transferred to the Madrid prison at Alcalá-Meco. There I met Julián, *el Cajas*, with whom I shared a cell for a couple of days. We talked about escapes and we agreed to try to cut through the floor of the van that would take us to Cádiz. We prepared a couple of saws, handles, and a small mirror, which would allow us to spy on the escort. We also obtained some small metal plates to jam the door locks. Julián was a real specialist in the workings of the vans so if all went well we had a good chance to escape.

The transport van came to collect us that morning. In the American cells of the intake I met a Galician who came to greet me. He was called Teixera.

“Are you Che?” he approached me.

“Yes, who are you?”

“I’m a friend of Anxo and Musta. They’ve told me a lot about you and I wanted to meet you,” he answered, extending his hand.

We shook.

“Good. Where are you going?” I asked.

“To Puerto, and you?”

“To Puerto too.”

Once the van had set off and we were on the outskirts of Madrid, we went to work on the floor. We opened some of the doors, and Teixera and the other prisoners covered us by standing in the corridor, blocking the view of the Guardia Civil. Kneeling on the floor, we took turns cutting through the plate steel. It took a lot of work. We succeeded in opening an initial hole but we had to stop cutting because the Guardia Civil were constantly watching the group of prisoners huddling in the corridor, so we left it for the next day. That afternoon, we reached the prison in Córdoba and spent the night there. We rested and the following day, early in the morning, we resumed the journey. With the van on the road, we asked to go to the toilet and then jammed the door open.

“This isn’t working, José, we’re going too slowly,” he said to me.

“We can’t cut any faster without breaking the saw, and if it breaks we’re really fucked.”

“We’ll cut for a couple more hours and if we don’t make any progress, we’ll cover up what we have already cut and use it on another journey, maybe for ourselves, maybe a friend or companion? All right?”

“Sounds good to me”

“Let’s do that then.”

We went back to the corridor and continued trying to cut the steel and lift it, but we didn’t succeed. So we collected cigarette ashes and, together with other waste, we hid the open slots we had cut into the floor. We had tried, and in any case we had done most of the work, which could be used by other prisoners in the future to finish the job. Good luck!

Once in Puerto de Santa María, I was driven to Puerto 2, where I met up with Paco and some other political prisoners. José Mari had been transferred to the prison hospital in Madrid for some tests.

This time I only spent a couple of days in Cádiz.

In Herrera, meanwhile, there had been another kidnapping. José Antonio Apón Mercader, known as *el Africano*, had taken a guard hostage and barricaded the hostage and himself in his cell to show support for the prisoners in the special regime and to demand an end to the beatings by the guards there. The kidnapping only lasted a couple of hours. They attacked him. Meanwhile, on the other side of the prison walls, Juan José Garfia had taken his own hostage. The press reported the kidnapping of a Lt. Colonel of the Guardia Civil as well as a shoot-out in which an officer of the Guardia Civil had been shot in the head at close range. These actions were blamed on Juanjo. There quickly followed a manhunt, except in this case the hunted could return fire and it would not be easy for them.

I hoped they wouldn't catch him. As for me, on the third day of my stay in Puerto 2, they came to take me in chains to the ferry *J.J. Sister*, inside a prison van, with the destination of Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Prison of Tenerife 2, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, March 1991

When I arrived at Tenerife 2 things had changed. My friend Anxo Fernández and his companion Lisardo González Reyes had tried to pull off an escape but had not succeeded. Discipline had been hardened and they had both been transferred to tougher prisons. I was assigned again to a cell in isolation. I got hassled when I tried to talk to some companions and give them tobacco.

"Tarrío!" one of the guards shouted at me.

"What?"

"You can't open the peepholes or talk through them," he told me. "And you can't give tobacco to prisoners under sanctions either," he added.

I ignored him and shared out the pack of tobacco regardless,

lighting a cigarette for each one through the peepholes of the doors.

"You have some nerve, Tarrío," he threatened me.

"What, do you get a kick out of making men suffer with all these prohibitions?" I spat.

"It's forbidden by the rules and you know it."

"Forbidden to be human, right? Go write me up if you want to..."

"You can be sure I will..."

New bars had been welded onto the windows of the cells, this time vertically. They had also blocked the door to the next unit and made a new one that went directly out onto the yard. They had also built a central door on the bridge that was kept closed at night and only opened during the day. There was no doubt security had been increased. I talked about it with Juan Caamaño, a prisoner from Valladolid who I met in the unit in first grade. We talked through the windows.

"Do you see what's going on here Caamaño?"

"Yes, since you tried to escape and then Anxo and el Reyes, it's becoming unbearable. They're banning everything and they hit people for nothing. They keep..."

"Sons of bitches!"

"Hey do you have any more tobacco in there?"

"Yes."

"Can you give me some more?"

"Wait a minute."

I looked inside my bags for a couple of packs of cigarettes that I had from the boat and made a string from some pieces of a bed sheet. I looked out the windows again and tied a piece of soap on to the end of the string. I called him.

"Caamaño..."

"Go on."

"Put something out the window so I can throw you a package."

"I've got the broom out."

“Okay, here it comes.” I threw it towards him and around the broom handle. He caught it.

“You got it?”

“Yes.”

On the other end I tied on the two packs and a pack of matches and let go of it.

“Good, take it in.”

“Where are you coming from now, Che?”

“From a few places. I was in Zamora and in Zaragoza for trials...”

“As you can see, it’s gotten shitty around here.”

Yes, it was a shithole. Why did they prohibit the prisoners from smoking when they were only sentenced to be deprived of their freedom? What sense did it make to add to the suffering of a person in solitary confinement by adding even more hardship? The goal was to succeed in totally breaking the will of the individual through suffering, in order to facilitate his alienation. That is why my act would be punished with isolation in a cell. I had disrupted the program, alleviating some of the anxiety of these prisoners. My penal history was full of incidents like this, costing me more than two years in isolation during my stay in prison.

I continued sharing tobacco with the prisoners who were under sanctions, so I was the subject of numerous punishments, which were suspended thanks to the doctors. They opposed the prolonged isolation that for years I had been subjected to. They believed these punishments could seriously damage my health and, despite objections from the Administration, had the punishments suspended indefinitely. However, even though I could use the shop, the common room, and had two hours a day on the yard, the Administration continued to keep me alone, with the excuse that there was no one else in my situation. My mail was intercepted by order of the director and stopped from coming in for purposes of processing even though I was not notified. They attempted to put pressure on me by keeping me incommunicado. I found some books in the

library by Albert Camus, *The Devil and The Good Lord* by Sartre, and one by Schopenhauer, a nihilistic German philosopher whom I had just discovered. I also found several graph-paper notebooks, in which, sitting at the table, I gave form to the thoughts that assaulted me after reading or in the dreamlike mental wandering of solitude. I became fond of writing and not a day passed when I didn't jot down some thoughts or a poem in these notebooks, which had turned into my confidantes. At night, I got visits from the guards outside who would shine their lights though the bars and over the bed where I slept, deliberately disturbing me. I would insult them, but they would just laugh and leave, coming back to disturb me again later with the excuse of a cell check. One night, fed up with these provocations I filled a bucket of water and squatted underneath the grill of the cell door. I waited there, smoking a cigarette waiting for them to peer through the bars, which didn't take long. Once at the door, they shone the light on the bed and surprised that I wasn't there, started to call me:

"Tarrío, show yourself so we can see you..."

I didn't answer, and they came closer to the window.

"Tarrío, stop playing with us and stand up," they shouted.

I picked up the bucket, quickly stood, and threw the water all over them.

"Son of a bitch!" they insulted me. "Now you'll see!"

I had soaked them and they walked away dripping. I laughed, but I knew what I had done would bring me problems. I dressed and put my shoes on, and prepared myself for the worst.

A few minutes later they came into the unit. About a dozen of them came, brandishing batons in their hands, with the Head Warden leading them (from what I could see through the gate). They opened it up.

"Tarrío, we have to move you to another cell," one of them explained.

"No way."

“Do you want us to come in by force?”

“Try it and see,” I answered, as I grabbed the chair and started to pull out one of the steel legs.

“Come on, Tarrío, stop making life hard.”

“The only ones who are making my life hard are you bastards, and I’ve had it up to here with you aggravating me every night...”

“Put down the bar and nothing will happen, alright?” said one of the guards peeking through the slot. His breath stank of alcohol.

“No.”

They talked among themselves and then they left. To my surprise, they didn’t come back, but they sent one of the doctors first thing in the morning to talk to me and assess my state.

“Tarrío.”

“What?”

“Can I talk with you in your cell?”

“All right, but not with any guards around.”

“No, just me and you, alright?”

“Fine.”

He called for the key from one of the guards, and after opening it, came in. He closed the door behind him. We talked.

“What happened yesterday?” he asked.

“They’ve been disturbing me for several nights in a row and I threw water on them. They got drunk and came to harass me...”

“And what are you going to do?”

“I’m going on a hunger and thirst strike until they leave me alone, they let

me go out with the other prisoners, and give me back the radio and the electric keyboard they took from me.”

“Why did they take them?”

“To fuck with me and make life in the cells more difficult to bear. The director and deputy director won’t forgive me for trying to escape and they’re taking their revenge. Who knows...”

“I’ll talk with them to see what we can do, but don’t start a

hunger and thirst strike because you're going to damage yourself."

"It doesn't matter, I'm going to do it. I've made up my mind."

"Do what you like. It's better if you give me the piece of steel and the chair. They won't do anything to you, you have my word."

"Take them."

"I'm going to go talk with the director, I promise you."

"Good."

I didn't eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner. I declared a hunger and thirst strike and lay on the bed. I gave up my yard hours and didn't leave the cell, except to buy tobacco in the shop. The doctors visited me daily to try in vain to convince me to abandon the strike. I had sent two letters, one to the JVP, and the same one to the Administration, holding them responsible and informing them of what was happening to me. I kept this up for the five days it took for them to decide to give in to my demands. I was notified by one of the doctors.

"Tarrío," he said to me, "they're going to give you back the radio and the keyboard, and let you have some company on the yard. As for the night-time checks, they're going to keep doing them but won't disturb you or use a lamp. What do you think?"

"Who said this?" I asked.

"It was said to me personally by Don Joaquín, the director, a moment ago."

"Fine, tell him I'll stop the strike..."

"That's good news."

This measure would benefit all of us, since they would have to take out companions under sanctions for me on the yard, and this would allow us to share tobacco more easily throughout the unit and this would break the rigid discipline of isolation. We had won something from all this. As for me, the keyboard and the radio made the days more entertaining, while I looked for another accomplice and the elements for another escape attempt.

I received a visit from a psychologist. We talked in the small infirmary located in the unit:

“Hello, Tarrío, how are you doing?”

“I’m very well.”

“Are you continuing with the strike?”

“Not any more.”

“The Directorate sent me,” she said in a serious tone. “We want to know if you’re going to persist with this attitude, or if on the contrary you’re going to cooperate with the rehabilitation.”

“What is my attitude?” I asked her.

“Come on, Tarrío, you know what I’m referring to. You reject treatment, constantly fail to respect the professionals who work here, though they’re doing the best that they can, and you appear unapproachable with every attempt at dialogue. It’s very difficult to talk to you...”

“We’re talking now aren’t we?”

“Yes, but what we want is that you collaborate so you can leave here for another unit. Don’t think you’ll keep enduring this situation for much longer; in the end you’ll regret it. We are the system and it’s useless to rebel against the system; so the only thing that’s going to happen is you’re going to spend more years in jail when you could be getting other benefits...”

“Listen lady, the system that you think is so great seems like shit to me. That people are locked up in cells and not allowed to smoke seems like an unnecessarily sadistic act. As for your program, I will keep my opinions to myself so as to not offend your sensibilities, but it makes me sick...” I paused a little and then continued. “As for dialogue, you should be the last ones to criticise me for failing to communicate since you are incapable of putting together ten words without a hidden threat or a blackmail. The problem, lady, is not with me, its roots are that you don’t follow the Prison Regulations, and there are constant abuses of power. You don’t follow the legislation or the laws, and instead of providing paid work for prisoners, you

produce little dictators, hard work for no pay, and endless punishment for those who won't accept their blessed treatment. How do you talk to someone who bases their dialogue in torture, domination, and blackmail? Believe me, you're not as good and honourable and professional as you think."

My words took her by surprise.

"It's you who is imprisoned here for breaking the law, not me. I don't think that this institution is totally perfect, but we believe in what we do and we do it honourably. And you should know that the majority of prisoners work and serve their sentences in half the time, something I doubt you will ever do with this confrontational attitude."

"Well, we'll see," I answered, sitting up, and so ending the interview.

Her words were a warning. They wanted to emphasise the fact that I was totally at their mercy, and that they could do to me all that they deemed necessary for rehabilitation. They knew that I was HIV positive and that this weighed heavily on my spirit. This, in addition to the punishment cells and the confiscation of my mail (the only emotional support inside the prison, since my family's distance impeded any other type of contact), would force me to reconsider and give in.

To achieve that would be a successful outcome for the Administration in Madrid. I was just a guinea pig for their experiments in techniques of repression. Once inmates entered the prison grounds, they were turned over to teams of doctors, teachers, psychologists, and jailers to be experimented upon. The results of these experiments in dehumanization and torture are turned into administrative prizes and promotions. It sounds cruel, but this was the reality, a fatal reality that any human being could experience by simply committing an error and going to prison, and once inside trying to maintain his dignity, his feelings, and his pride. The system feeds on human flesh. It obligates you to participate through the

threat of prison, and, once inside prison, through the threat of punishment. The psychologist with her speech and her defence of such methods, collaborated with such despicable people: stingy and miserable technocrats who used their techniques to uncaringly exterminate the most disadvantaged social classes, and above all the most rebellious. This whole repressive system, based on the constant threat of punishment, lacked a foundation; it was clumsy and foolish. Instead of trying to foster co-existence it destroyed it, degrading those who worked towards co-existence, fostering hate and violence in those suffering under it.

This prison system is based in carceral terrorism that the mercenaries of the press usually cover up, and which is permitted by the judges, who avoid their responsibilities, blinded by the power they have, (which turns them into untouchables, into false idols). So when mistreatment or irregularities are raised in front of a judge, he limits himself to confirming the good work of the Administration. Then it is sent to the Provincial Court, which ratifies the decision of the judge. Finally it goes to a Constitutional Tribunal, and several years later, maybe, you win. But by then you had been moved to another prison and had to start all over again. It was all nicely tied up without any loose ends, legally and democratically.

I was able to make a telephone call to the outside. I learned that my friend Chico had been arrested again, accused of robbing a bank. From then on I would have to depend on myself alone.

I decided to talk to Caamaño about organising a kidnapping in the unit and to attempt an escape disguised as guards. He promised me he would think about it and give me an answer.

Summer came, and with it, the heat. I used the sun to give myself a tan and to cure myself somewhat of the acne that covered my back and part of my chest. I was helped by a Canarian prisoner who had been placed in the closed regime. With cotton and iodine mixed with alcohol, he cleaned my wounds every day. He was known as Malaje and was an extraordinary companion who was

respected for his easy-going attitude. Thanks to his care, most of the wounds healed up.

Inside the unit, the monotony was the same every day. The heat was unbearable, so I was in the habit of bringing several buckets of water out with me to the yard to shower in the nude. Then I would sunbathe. In the afternoon, I would sit in front of the table and write poems and thoughts in my notebooks. I was also thinking of writing a book about all this, but finally gave up on the idea because I didn't have enough confidence in my writing. I was not ready, so I continued writing down small thoughts. Malaje was the only reader. He criticised my brutal writing style, which ran through all my work, but it was my way of seeing the world, of understanding human beings, of expressing my disgust for what lay behind these walls.

The food was reasonably good and the medical treatment polite. I no longer had tachycardia, thanks to a prescription of Tranxilium 50 that I had been prescribed. This let me sleep deeply at night. But my relations with the guards continued to worsen until they became almost unbearable. I hated them and they hated me. It was inevitable.

One afternoon in July I had an argument with one of them; he was trying to lock me in the cell before my time. I refused to go into it, daring him to make me. He called for backup and a group of guards came onto the unit. I broke off a broom handle and went up to the second level of the unit. The Head Warden talked to me from below.

"Tarrío, put down the stick and go into the cell."

"No, not until my yard time is finished."

"Do you want us to come up there and take you down?"

"Come on, but if you do you'll get it in the head..."

I said this, and they started to come up the stairs in a group. They stopped a few metres away from where I was waiting.

"Tarrío, give me the stick," shouted the Head Warden.

If I gave it up they'd beat me all the same so I refused again.

"No, and don't come any closer..."

They ignored me and, step by step, they came on up. Once at my level, I swung at one of them with the broomstick and a fight immediately broke out. They jumped on me in a pack and I was restrained, kicked, and dragged back to the cell. They smashed it up and tore up pictures of my family in front of me along with some letters, throwing the rest on the floor. They confiscated the notebooks I wrote in and broke the keyboard and the radio. Once they had satisfied themselves with their low deeds, they locked me in the cell.

“Next time we’ll break your legs, understand?” threatened the Head Warden through the grille. “I don’t want to hear any more complaints about you. Don't forget it.”

Once they had marched away I went about collecting the cards and the torn photos, trying to organise the mess a little. I succeeded in fixing some of them with tape but others had to be thrown away. I also fixed the radio but not the keyboard. I was furious. I washed off the blood that came from my mouth in the sink and looked at my reflection. One of my cheeks was swollen and the marks from several blows were reddening on my back. Juan Caamaño called out to me. We talked through the windows.

“What happened?”

“Nothing. Have you thought about what I said?” I answered.

“Yes, I’m up for it.”

“Good, then we have to talk.”

“Are you all right?”

“A bit bruised but I’m in good spirits.”

The next day, during our exercise, I managed to get two bits of metal out from one of the doors to make two knives. I passed one to Caamaño and prepared mine. I made it into a sharp point.

That afternoon, a judge from the JVP made an appearance in the prison and asked me to come see him. I accepted the offer to talk with him and was taken into his presence, in one of the offices in the centre. He was waiting for me with the public prosecutor. He

greeted me and I answered curtly.

"Have a seat," he invited. "We are here because we received several complaints from you and your companions protesting about mistreatment in the isolation unit. What do you have to say about it?" he asked me, pointing at a mountain of letters with my name and handwriting on them on the metal table.

"Do you see my swollen cheek?" I showed him, "This is just a small example of what often happens here. Another is these marks," I continued, showing him my back, "which you'll agree I would have had difficulty self-inflicting."

"When did this happen?" asked the attorney.

"Yesterday."

"What was the reason?" asked the judge.

"Because I would not go into the cell from the yard when I still had exercise time left."

"I don't believe him," interrupted the attorney. "The prison, if you aren't aware, has made a complaint against you for hitting an employee with a stick. What's more, we have read your record. You recently threatened another employee with a knife so that you could go on to stab a prisoner, you have participated in strikes and riots, and several escape attempts. How can you even hope we will believe you with such a record?"

"Look, it's true that I hit a guard with a stick but it was in self defence. They keep me isolated most of the time, they censor my mail without authorisation, they break my things, threaten me, and blackmail me constantly, breaking the rules whenever they want. Do you also expect me to let them beat me with impunity? If you did your job all this could be avoided..."

"The problem is you, not us. You present a danger to everyone else and isolation or extended time in first grade is a measure of caution until your behaviour demonstrates, through your deeds, that you are prepared to get along with other people."

"I see you have quickly reached an agreement here," I responded.

“Have you ever asked why there is violence in prison? I am HIV positive, gentlemen, and we, the HIV positive prisoners, are killed without the least regard. I’m not saying it is done directly, but punishments and disciplinary measures constantly affect the health and the well-being of those of us who are in prison. You not only get to deny us Article 60, but we are also beaten, dominated, and harassed with your rules. While this goes on, you appear unmoved, arrogant, and unapproachable. This contempt for the lives of others that you and the State show on a daily basis, with this detached attitude and sick arrogance, kills whatever good sentiment or humanity is in those who suffer under it, myself included. Therefore you are responsible in a large part for the violence that you criticise. You condemn people and send them to prison, but then ignore what happens to them there. That is the problem in my opinion, and nothing else...”

“Well,” interrupted the judge, “If you behave well I will see that you are given yard time with several companions of yours and that they respect your rights, provided that your behaviour deserves it. It all depends on your attitude.”

“Oh, so you’re not going to do anything, right?”

“I repeat: it all depends on your behaviour.”

“Do what you like, but if something happens don’t hold me responsible. Don’t put all the blame on me...”

“Is that a threat?” asked the prosecutor.

“No, it’s the truth. If, for you, justice means a static equilibrium, with a balance that is tipped towards the powerful through a system of security, benefits, and legal traps, and it is maintained rigidly and severely against those of us who don’t have the economic means to defend ourselves, then don’t expect me to believe in your methods, or that I’ll just cross my arms while you decide what to do with my life.”

“With ideas like that you’re going to spend a long time in prison, Tarrío,” replied the prosecutor.

“We will do what we can,” added the judge coldly.

I went back to the cell. Once inside I sent a note to Juan Caamaño to set out some guidelines to follow in the kidnapping and subsequent escape. We would try to capture several guards, put them in cells, and, dressing in their clothes, get into the yard and from there into the street. We were confident that everything would go well. I wished with all my soul for it to go well, to fuck this rabble, thumb my nose at them and leave them all behind. I was sure we would succeed; I just had to do it.

On the morning of July 5th, they transferred a juvenile prisoner into the unit. He was just a kid. I didn't know why they had put him in there, but when a group of guards put him into one of the cells and sprayed tear gas, I started to bang on the doors and insult them.

"What's wrong Tarrío?" asked one of them.

"What's wrong is that you are a bunch of cowardly torturers!" I shouted.

They opened the cell. They came in with batons, beating me without giving me space or time to react. Then they left, but not before threatening me. In jail, it is prohibited to help others or protest publicly against the methods of these brutes. Despite this and other beatings, we prisoners would have to help each other if we wanted to survive all this with a minimum of dignity.

In the afternoon I received an unpleasant visit from a guard who I knew from Zamora. In that prison he had enjoyed beating me along with his colleagues, and now he tried to compel me with the account of this (for him) heroic act.

"What's up, you son of a bitch?" he said to me through the grille. "Are you not tired of getting hit? Well, I'm your guard today, so be careful, because at the smallest excuse... or did you forget about me?"

I remembered him perfectly.

"Of course I remember you," I answered him, approaching the door.

"Good, well I don't want to hear from you again for the rest of the afternoon, all right?"

I didn't respond to the provocation. An hour after this visit they came and opened up so I could go to the yard to enjoy a walk. In one of my sneakers I had hidden a small homemade steel blade. This son of a bitch was going to pay for it all at once. I didn't have any problem with getting the knife past the pat-down search they carried out every time they let me out of the cell. He was at the door onto the yard, towards which I walked. His face reflected the typical smugness of someone who felt protected by a uniform, a badge, and a whole system; someone who knows he can act with impunity from justice or laws, since he is the only law and justice. He was going to say something to me when my fist struck him in the face, making him stumble backwards and fall onto the floor. Completely surprised that a prisoner had the nerve to lift a hand to him, he got onto all fours, moving towards the sentry box, from which he came out armed with a baton.

"I'm going to fuck you up!" he shouted furiously, while throwing himself at me.

I ducked, going onto one knee, and took the knife out of my shoe. When he saw it he stopped, dropped the truncheon and raised his hands indicating he would offer no resistance. His face was a picture.

"Easy, Tarrío, please..."

I got close to him and grabbed his shirt, kneeling him down in front of me. I sliced his hand, which was clutching the top of his head, trembling and astonished.

"Well, not so brave now are you?" I shouted at him, beside myself, "or are you only brave when you're in a gang in front of a naked defenceless child?" I added, in clear reference to the beating at Zamora.

"Easy, man, easy, let's settle this peacefully, eh?" said the other guard to me from the other part of the unit.

"Don't do anything stupid, Tarrío, please, calm down..."

I looked at my hostage. I wanted to kill him, but I decided not to, fearing the consequences that this act would bring down on me.

I still had hopes and ways to transform them into reality, so I finally let him go.

“Look, you pig, I’m letting you go. If one day you take revenge and try to beat me again, know that I will kill you without a second thought, are we clear?”

“Yes, Tarrío, I promise, nothing will happen to you...”

I went to the cell. They closed the door and I got rid of the knife, which I passed to Caamaño through the window. I fell onto the bed, disturbed and stressed about what would happen next. Soon, a big group of guards came to the cell and transferred me to another one, in handcuffs. They didn’t hit me or threaten me, simply changed cells and confiscated my belongings. They asked me for the knife but I told them I had thrown it down the toilet. Then they took me, handcuffed to an empty cell. Later the guard I had cut came to see me. His hand was bandaged and he was not in uniform, so I assumed that his shift had ended. We talked through the grille.

“Listen, Tarrío, I know Zamora wasn’t good, but I followed orders like the rest of them.” He was making excuses. “What happened today has made me see things in another way, to be honest. I talked with my companions so there won’t be any reprisals against you for this...”

“Good...” I answered, surprised by his attitude.

“This place brutalises us all over time; don’t think it’s easy working here but it puts food on the table.”

“It’s better to go hungry than to torture someone to avoid it,” I answered.

“Yes, but someone has to do this job... Listen, you didn’t have any blood or anything on that knife did you? I know you’re HIV positive...”

“No, it was clean.”

“Good, I have to go. I feel bad that things have to be like this.”

“It’s prison,” I answered, summing up all the badness with this fateful word, which the men and women of the world would do well to, in some-not-so-distant day, eliminate from the face of the earth.

A day after this incident Juan Redondo Fernández, the well-known escapist from Jaén arrived at the prison, transferred from the island of Ibiza. His arrival prompted the release from the unit of Juan Caamaño, who before leaving hid the two knives inside the cell. He told me about them and wished me luck. For security reasons the director didn't want more than two prisoners in the unit, so he could have better control over us. They came back to move me to another cell and took off the chains. They also gave me back my belongings. At exercise time I could go to the gates of the cell where Juan Redondo was being held and talk to him for a few minutes. He had a hard, penetrating stare, softened by round glasses held around his neck by a cord.

"Hello, my name is José," I introduced myself.

"I'm Juan."

"Garfia told me a lot of good things about you," I said, "so if you need anything just ask me, alright?"

"Right now I don't need anything. How are things here?"

"Good enough, even though the guards are dogs. You'll see for yourself."

"Well, I'm going to get set up. We'll talk later, José."

"All right."

I went to the yard to walk. The presence of Juan cheered me up, since I was confident we could do something positive together. Once we knew each other a little better I would explain the escape I had planned with Caamaño, so we could try it together. He had carried out three successful escapes and attempted ten more, so I had no doubt about a future agreement to escape from Tenerife 2.

On the 10th, Herrera de la Mancha exploded again. Víctor Llopis, Cristóbal Morel, Vázquez Ayude, and Benito Toledano took several guards hostage, along with a psychologist, and then freed the other prisoners who joined the uprising. The reason for this action, taken

at knifepoint, was to protest. They were not trying to escape, but denounced the prison situation in support of APRE(r) and the principles it promoted. They asked the media to publicise a list of demands, among which they emphasized an end to torture in Spanish jails; the release of all AIDS prisoners and other terminally ill inmates; the denunciation of the Administration's intention to form (with some prisoners) a GAL: charged with assassinating the most important political prisoners; and an improvement to medical care in prisons. During the course of this kidnapping, which was necessary in order to be heard by society and to force the authorities to negotiate, Cristóbal Moral stabbed and killed another prisoner who was in jail for rape. To be a rapist was very dangerous in prison and this was the reason for his death. The law of the prison underworld was hard and cruel, perhaps too much so. The rest of the prisoners would not consent to sharing the yard with rapists, and that was it. This death was to show society and the Administration that the prisoners would not accept rapists in the yards, nor in prisons, and that these despicable humans did not belong in our world. The rapist in the prison population was not accepted and lived in constant fear of being discovered, as generally they were kept in different departments, separated from the rest of the prisoners and protected by the Administration. They were given jobs working in the office, the kitchen, or in other trusted positions. Scorned by the large majority of prisoners, they became obligated to spy, working hand in hand with the jailers, their only friends on the inside. The resisting prisoners had made a serious error in letting the rapist into the yard along with the rest of the prisoners, likewise the timing of killing him was ill-chosen, since obviously society would not understand it. It made the uprising seem cynical and hypocritical: demanding human rights when they had murdered someone. How could you explain this inconsistency? People would not understand, since they did not understand prison or the terrible violence that these walls could generate in the men jailed there. Despite this death, the negotiations continued. The Administration

accepted, twenty-eight hours into the kidnapping, to make the demands public in exchange for the release of the hostages, whose well-being they were starting to fear for. Radio Nacional broadcast the communiqué, read by the prisoners, several times, and once it had been confirmed that they had broadcast all the terms as agreed by the negotiations, the hostages were freed and the prisoners surrendered. They had achieved their objective.

This action provided a lot of ink for the press, particularly the most sensationalist. The letters APRE(r) started to be used regularly in the news and opinion pages and the association started to make its presence felt. It had become well respected among many of the prisoners in the special regime. The protests to the judges against the abuses of the Administration were greatly increasing, causing open concern in the Penal Institution. Because of this the Directorate-General sent a directive to all the prisons with strict orders to intercept the oral and written communication of a number of prisoners considered responsible for APRE(r) or who were active members. It was illegal, but they could do it since it had the approval of most of the JVP. They also adopted a policy of dispersion for the prisoners who, according to their criteria, had the most influence on the prison population and who were involved in the activities of APRE(r). Once more instead of listening and attempting to change the irregularities of its penal system and correct the abuses that had been denounced, facilitating the release of AIDS prisoners, providing better medical teams and better food, and fully implementing the rules of the Penal Code, the Directorate General of Penal Institutions faced the challenge through control and repression using cruelty and destruction.

Juan Redondo and I were becoming closer. I told him of my escape plan and he informed me of another possibility on the boat.

“The boat is a good way out, don’t you think?”

“No,” I answered, “unless it’s overpowering them when they take us from the cells...”

“More or less. I know a way to open the door.”

“How?”

“If it comes to it, I’ll tell you,” he answered, reserving the information to make sure I wouldn’t use it if I were transferred before him. “But we could provoke a transfer and try together. Your plan is good, but on an island I presume we wouldn’t have a good possibility of succeeding, while from Cádiz we could easily lose ourselves on the mainland. What do you say?”

“How can we get transferred together?” I asked, attracted by the idea.

“We stage a kidnapping and protest all this. After a hostage taking, you’re always transferred.”

“Give me some time to think about it, all right?”

“Okay, if you’re good with what I’m saying we’ll do it together, and if not I’ll try it alone. I want to do something in support of our companions.”

“I’ll let you know soon.”

I thought about it all night. It was obvious we had more opportunities in mainland Spain than on an island. Also, I was already openly in conflict with the Administration and its methods and I was not indifferent to the fight of these prisoners, so I decided it was a good time to go from theory to practice, throwing down for them and for myself. The worst thing that could happen was that I would stay locked up in a cell. This is what I made known to my new comrade.

“Juan, I’ll give you a hand with the kidnapping, but only until the demands are read on the radio. Once the protest against the jail conditions is made public, we leave it, and we try to escape from the boat.” I paused and then continued. “I want the subject of AIDS to be in the list of demands, although you had probably already thought about that, right?”

“I agree with you. I’ll write the demands on some paper for you to have a look at and see if you’re in agreement with them. Now we

have to arrange a meeting with the judge of Vigilance and prepare a trap for him.”

“You have more experience in this than I do, so we’ll do whatever you think is best. If I think of anything I’ll tell you. As for knives we can use two that I have hidden in the unit.”

Soon we came to an agreement. Besides our ideas of escape, we both had an immense contempt for the penal Administration. Now all that was left was for Juan to get an interview with the judge and to act. The judge would be an appropriate hostage since he was the appointed authority responsible for the abuses in this prison, as he had been given the job to ensure that the rights of prisoners were respected.

They started to let me out on the yard again. They had been given strict orders not to let Juan and myself out of the cells at the same time. They were afraid that what was already unstoppable would happen. I sent some of the most cherished photos of my family in a letter to a friend and destroyed the rest. I did the same with all the letters, which went in the trash. On his side, Juan worked on the list of demands and gave me a copy. It consisted of thirteen points, among which the most important were the following:

1. *The immediate release of all prisoners with terminal diseases.*
2. *An effective judicial investigation to assess the physical and mental health of the special regime prisoners Javier Ávila Navas, Laudelino Iglesias, Luis Rivas Dávila, Antonio Losa López, and Vicente Sánchez Montañés, whose exact whereabouts are unknown and who are assumed to be subjected to constant torture.*
3. *Protest against the Administration’s intention to create a prison GAL charged with assassinating political prisoners in exchange for prison privileges, as suggested to several prisoners in Alcalá-Meco.*
4. *The total eradication of mistreatment against prisoners in Spanish prisons, as well as an immediate end to abuses against their relatives and friends.*
5. *The transfer of all prisoners who request it to prisons near their places*

of origin, to facilitate communication with relatives and avoid family disruption which produces a lot of anger in relation to these transfers. This point is particularly relevant to HIV positive prisoners.

6. *The creation of minimum security centres and open regimes for all prisoners who have AIDS, in which the best possible medical care should be provided, and which could also provide employment as guaranteed by the Spanish Constitution to all its citizens, which is to be implemented by the State.*

I made my agreement with the list of points known to Redondo; they reinforced my reasons for this action. No one, absolutely no one, could deny the legitimacy of these demands, which circumstances of legal defencelessness forced us to present through violence. Could we really change anything through dialogue or through courts that are charged with judging disputes between citizens? If our dispute was the dispute of those who have nothing against those who have everything, could we really have any possibility of obtaining justice? No. How could they provide us with a salary, a living, or a job, when they were not even capable of sharing these things with respectable citizens? Who was going to provide humanity, work, and credibility to an ex-con infected with AIDS? Who, really? Dead from a social point of view, dispossessed of rights that we never really had, for many of us there was no place on the outside. Sick with an incurable disease, jobless, penniless, homeless. Where would we go? What would we do? Society's punishment would pursue us eternally; the shadow of prison would follow us wherever we went, like a black ghost, impossible to forget and then, as now, we will have no exits, no options: trapped.

In the unit some problems arose. Around noon, a group of guards came in carrying a young prisoner in chains, handcuffed hand and foot, who they threw into a cell. I was enjoying my lunch hour and talking through the door with Juan, when I stopped to ask a guard what was the cause of the mistreatment:

“Listen, what happened for you to treat my companion like this?”
“Nothing for anyone else to worry about.”

“I worry because it matters to me. You can’t leave a guy like that, handcuffed hand and foot. At least take them off...” I tried to reason with him.

“Not until the Head Warden gives the order.”

“Well, at least call in a doctor to attend to his injuries.”

“The doctor’s been told already.”

When the guards left the unit I went towards the cell into which this prisoner had been put and opened the grille to talk to him. He was lying on the floor with his face swollen from blows and his feet and hands purple from the pressure of the handcuffs biting his ankles and wrists.

“Relax, the doctor’s on his way,” I said to him. “Are they hurting you?” I added, referring to the shackles.

“Yes.”

“What happened to you?”

“I punched a guard in the cafeteria...”

“I’ll talk to the doctor to get you out of those cuffs, all right?”

“Okay.”

When the doctor came onto the unit, accompanied by the Head Warden, I went towards them and addressed the doctor:

“Listen, this guy’s hands and feet are swollen, so you have to take the cuffs off him.”

“I’ll going to see him now, Tarrío,” he answered.

“What are you doing here?” interrupted the Head Warden.

“I’m on my lunch hour.”

“All right, but go out on the yard for your walk.”

“Not until you take the handcuffs off my companion.”

“Calm down man. I’m going to go see him right now,” the doctor said, in a vain attempt to calm me down. “Go outside and I will come out and talk to you. All right?” he added.

“I hope you order the cuffs taken off him, because if not you’re

going to make me cause a big fuss.”

“I’ll report you for making threats...” said one of the guards in the corridor of the unit.

I left without responding to the bullshit. At last, it was put to an end and the doctor agreed with the Head Warden to take the cuffs off. He came to see me and I thanked him sincerely. At the end of my lunch hour, I went to the cell that this prisoner was in, and, opening the grille in the door, passed some matches and cigarettes through the grille, and then went back to the cell. Before locking me in, the guard notified me that this would earn me another punishment. Poor idiot.

On 26 July, the Judge of Vigilance and the public prosecutor arrived at the prison to conduct interviews with Juan and other prisoners. Around twelve, they sent for my comrade, who was taken to the central building by several guards. The interview lasted about an hour; it was entirely about the prison situation. When it ended, they took him back to the unit, passing me as I was throwing food scraps into the garbage can. He said to me:

“They’re here. You have to take charge of this one now...”

Without hesitation I went into the cell and took the knife from its hiding place. I concealed it and went out again, heading towards the guard in the sentry box while Juan engaged a teacher, succeeding in keeping his cell door open.

“Listen,” I said to the guard, “I need to go out onto the yard and pick up some magazines that were left there for me this morning.”

“I’ll get them for you and give them to you later.”

“Come on, man, open up for a moment so I can grab them.”

He paid no attention and got up, going into the yard to look for the magazines, which didn’t exist. We needed him to open the door so that we could take all of them without anyone sounding the alarm. This one was too suspicious, though, so we would have to act anyway, by holding the teacher and the guard, an old guard at that, with the hope that we would have enough time to reach the Centre before they could raise the alarm. I thought about this as the guard

from the unit approached me:

“Tarrío, you have to go back to your cell.”

“Hang on, I have to go to find some magazines, do you have keys? They’re out in the yard but apparently your friend can’t find them there...”

“I can’t open the door, Tarrío...”

Then the other guard appeared:

“Tarrío, I can’t see them anywhere...”

“Let me go out there, I’m sure they are there.”

“All right, but my companion has to open it up,” he answered, coming into the sentry box.

When the guard who was with us put the key in the door and opened it, I grabbed him by the collar and threatened him:

“Leave it asshole, let’s go,” then I said to Juan, “come on, let’s go, it’s open...”

With a shove, I pushed the teacher into the cell and put the guard in with him. We closed the door after them, shutting the latch, and ran to the yard with a chair and a table from the room. Inside the sentry box, the other guard was trying to warn the Centre through his radio, so we had to act quickly. We put the table in the yard, against the wall, and the chair on top of that.

Juan climbed up and grabbed the roof with his hands, hanging there. Then with some difficulty, I climbed up using his body; once I was up, I lifted him by the arms. We went to the outside and ran towards the Centre through the gardens. We went down the stairs of the infirmary and rushed towards the door that gave access to the Centre, which was still open. We came across a guard who was carrying pepper spray, which he dropped when I threatened him with the knife. Cuffs fell from his pocket and Juan put them on him, and came running after me. I went through the door and quickly up the stairs but I didn’t get there in time. They saw me coming and closed the doors, leaving outside a tearful, frightened social worker, whom I took hostage. Behind the reinforced windows of

the Centre, guards, teachers, the judge and the director looked at me with astonished faces. I lost no time and went down the stairs again, looking for my comrade Juan. I found him on the lower floor, in the telephone switchboard room, with two guards at his feet.

"They closed the door on me but I got this one," I told him.

"Good, let me put the cuffs on her," he said, coming out from the room.

As he came through the door of the American cell one of the guards got up and tried to close it, surprising Juan, who had his back turned. Although I jumped on and managed to tackle him, I couldn't stop the door from closing under its own weight. I was trapped with the two guards inside the armoured switchboard room, with a door that could only open from the outside. They didn't have the keys.

"Now what?" I asked Juan through the glass, uncertain.

"It won't open?"

"Of course not! I think the keys are in the Centre."

"I'm going to have a quick look around upstairs to see what we can do. In the meantime, stay calm and guard these two, all right?"

"Okay, but be careful."

"Don't worry."

He cuffed the hands of the social worker behind her back and went up the stairs with her. I sat the guards down on two chairs and tied them up. I was pretty nervous since being trapped in there with two hostages wasn't part of the plan. I also knocked over all the cabinets in the room and threw them in front of the door as a barricade, in case I was there for a while or if they tried to get in. There was a television, which I turned on to understand what was happening outside through the news. The waiting began. Telephones started ringing. They were calling me on all lines.

"Who's this?"

"Is this Tarrío or Redondo?" asked a voice.

"Tarrío. Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm a sergeant in the Guardia Civil and I want to talk to one of you."

"Talk," I said.

"Don't harm the hostages. We aren't going to intervene, all right?"

"We'll see what happens. For now, keep your people away from us. If we see a Guardia Civil uniform within five metres we'll be sending out some cold meat, you understand?"

"No one's going to come near you, you have my word, but stay calm and don't hurt anybody."

I didn't answer and hung up the telephone. This was a psychological ploy to show them that for now we were calling the shots and not them. Then I got a call from Juan.

"Is that you José?" he asked.

"Yes it's me, where are you?"

"I'm up here with fifteen more hostages in the cafeteria. We have everything we need: water, food, coffee... we can hold out here for a long time and not need anything. Now I'm trying to get you out of there..."

"Good, what do I do?"

"Wait until they come down to open up and don't talk on the telephone in case I need to call you again. Be careful in case they set a trap at the exit..."

"I'll be ready," I answered, hanging up the phone. "Get ready to move," I warned the guards, "and don't try anything or I'll kill you."

At that moment there came loud banging from the upper floor. I got worried and grabbed one of the hostages with the knife in my hand. I didn't know that these blows were Juan, with a hammer, breaking the reinforced glass of the doors in the Centre. One of the telephones started to ring. I picked it up. It was the Director.

"Tarrío, tell your companion to stop breaking the windows. We are sending the keys to get you out of there right now."

"Have the doctors bring them. No one else, understood?"

"Okay, but don't harm anyone."

When the noise stopped, I got in touch with Juan.

“Juan, they’re sending the keys over, so relax.”

“I know. I had to break some things to convince them. When you get up here, call at the door and be very careful. Don’t trust these pigs, José.”

“Right.”

I tied the two guards together. They would function as my barricade for climbing the stairs. I pulled back the cabinets and waited for the doctors to arrive. They weren’t long in coming and I spoke to them through the glass.

“Do you have the keys?”

“Yes.”

“Come on, open it up but no tricks. If there’s anyone hiding on the stairs, they’d better come out now, because otherwise these guys won’t survive. I’m ready for anything, I’m warning you.”

“No one is there, Tarrío, just us. We’re going to open up the door, but we hope you respect us and don’t take us hostage.”

“Fine, open up.”

They opened the door and stepped away from it. I went out of the room with the two guards, and over the barricade with a knife held at the throat of one of them. I went up the stairs with no problem, before the anxious faces of everyone looked at us through the broken glass in the windows Juan had smashed out. One of the doctors asked me for a favour before we got there:

“Tarrío, there’s a blonde girl there who you grabbed at the start, she’s a girlfriend of one of our companions. We’ve treated you well and we’re asking you to let her go...”

“Fine, but just her.”

“Thanks.”

We continued going up the stairs and, once in front of the cafeteria, I hit the door and called out to Juan:

“Open up, Juan.”

“Are you alone?” he asked me warily.

“Who do you think I’m going to bring? I’m here with the two guards.”

The door opened and I went in with the two hostages. We rapidly threw up a fridge as a barricade at the door and locked it with the key. Altogether we had seventeen hostages. They were seated in a row, on the floor, with their hands tied with lengths of rope. The cafeteria was quite wide and consisted of a kitchen, a bar with several seats and tables, and a washroom. The windows looked towards the infirmary situated just in front. My comrade handed me a large kitchen knife.

“Take this one, it’s better,” he said, smiling.

“Have you talked with them already?” I asked.

“Yes, I read the list of demands to the director, now we’re waiting for it to be on the radio...”

“Listen, Juan,” I interrupted him, “I want the blonde girl we grabbed first to be let go, because her boyfriend is one of the doctors and they’ve been good to me. I promised him.”

“Look, José, this isn’t a game, you know?” he answered, distressed. “Let’s go to the kitchen.”

In the kitchen we continued the conversation.

“We can’t go letting people out right away, since they could see it as a sign of weakness.”

“We have more than enough hostages, including some civilians. As I see it, we can let her go.”

“A little while ago I let go the woman in charge of the bar, an older lady. They will think we’re joking.”

“We let this one go and we keep the other sixteen hostages. I don’t see the problem.”

“Fine, but we’ll wait a while.”

“I’m okay with that.”

I left the kitchen and went to sort out the hostages. Among them there was the psychologist, two teachers, three guards, some social workers, and two eighteen year old guys, one a waiter and

one a sports instructor. It would be very difficult for them to assault us with so many hostages. Tenerife was a small island and soon their families would be outside the prison. The administration would have to think a lot before taking action. It was strange, but now that the beast in me had arisen, they all clamoured for reason and humanity. Now that the violence came from us, everyone wanted to talk. They left us to die in prison without any care except isolation and batons, murdering us democratically without any consideration and then they ask us for humanity while they had remained arrogant and unapproachable. What humanity did these people deserve, lacking basic feelings, when there was only room in their hearts for a bunch of keys which still echoed with the screams of men being beaten in punishment cells? They deserved to be stripped, and after being handcuffed, given a good beating so that they feel in their flesh the fruit of their honourable work as executioners of society. But that would reduce us to their level. There were important differences between them and us; it was easy enough to abuse a naked handcuffed man when you had the power. What was difficult, noble, was not do it. No, we would not harm them—unless the police tried an assault, and they knew this. It is when you have power over others that your true self comes out. Whoever is a brute acts like a brute; whoever is stupid acts stupidly; whoever is noble acts nobly; whoever is sadistic acts inevitably with sadism. The nature of people just manifests itself. That is why, when the time came, we would act with a purpose against the craziness, without revenge.

An hour later we freed the blonde girl, so I had been true to my word and so I thanked the doctors for the good treatment they had given me. We also took off the ropes of the rest, allowing them to go to the washroom if they needed. I took charge of watching the hostages while Juan took charge of the negotiations, which were going nowhere. The administrators didn't want to make the demands public because of their implications. So we asked to negotiate with Cristina Almeida, the United Left MP, who answered us on the radio.

She asked us to release the hostages and put an end to our protest, alluding to democracy and reason. It was disappointing. She would not help us, and not because we didn't possess enough of that reason (that she had brandished in her radio interview), but because to allow us any public legitimacy would cost her votes. The insincerity of this political pachyderm was insulting, so we decided to continue on with the kidnapping and our demands. We gathered up blankets and covered the windows to make it impossible for them to observe us or for a sniper to get a shot at us. As the hours went by, the tension increased. It was a matter of nerves. We knew that in the end we would have to surrender, but not before getting the necessary publicity to make our demands known to the outside world over the airwaves, and to the rest of the prisons where other prisoners could take their own measures.

When night fell, we moved the hostages and took turns on guard. We kept them all untied except for the guard who had been responsible for me being locked in the room downstairs, who we kept in handcuffs. He asked me to undo them:

"Tarrío, can you let me out of these handcuffs?"

"I don't have the keys."

"They were on the key ring that you took from me," he insisted.

"I don't have any keys, you imbecile. Got it?"

We were in the back of the cafeteria, sitting in some chairs. You could feel the tension in the silent air, as well as the fear in the faces of the hostages. A teacher and a social worker were crying inconsolably in each other's arms, and one of the young guys was doing the same. They had begun to doubt that there would be a happy ending. We had hooked up several radios on different frequencies, and through them constant news from the outside reached us. The whole island was in suspense and the forces of law and order had surrounded the prison awaiting orders or for events to unfold. They had still decided against making the demands public, so the standoff was prolonged into the night.

In the bar we found wine and beer, but we didn't drink more than two cans of beer between both of us.

I also drank several cups of coffee to keep me awake. One of the social workers asked for some:

"Can I have some coffee?"

"Of course, who's stopping you?" I answered. "You can make coffee for everyone except the guards. There's the coffee pot."

She prepared a pot of coffee and shared it out. I grabbed some cake from the shelf and a few bags of peanuts. This was my dinner.

"Are you going to let us go?" asked one of the social workers while I ate.

"If they broadcast what we want on the radio, yes."

"And what do you want?"

"Improvements."

"Doesn't it seem like this is a bad way to ask for them?"

"Would you listen if we had made our case in another way?"

"I don't know... but couldn't you try?"

"It wouldn't work."

"Do you know you're eating my birthday cake?" she said smiling, changing the topic.

"No shit!"

"We were celebrating my birthday when your companion arrived..."

"Do you want a piece?" I offered.

"No, not now..."

"Your loss, it's very good. Tell your friend," I added, pointing at a social worker who was crying, "to calm down, that it's going to be alright."

About two in the morning the phone rang. It was the director who told us that Antoni Asunción was going on the TV to talk about the prison problem.

"Do you want to see your boss on TV?" Juan asked the hostages.

"Yes," answered one of them.

We put the TV where we could all see it and turned up the volume. After a few minutes the Director-General came on. He asked for calm and professionalism from the prison staff. His speech was completely political, lacking sensitivity to the difficult situation that his workers were going through. We laughed when the hostages started to lash out at him. The intervention of the head of the administration clarified nothing about the situation, so we decided to free a hostage, seizing the moment of indignation that he had caused. Juan called me aside.

“Look, we’re going to release one of them with a note for him to make public on the radio in exchange for his release.”

“I’m fine with that. Who are you thinking of?”

“One of the teachers who has a communist party card. I’ll go talk to him.”

“Okay.”

A little while later we freed one of the hostages with a note, a communiqué of several points for the press. Juan had agreed with the hostage that he would do it on his own, without consulting the Director, for the good of the other hostages. An hour later we heard him on the radio, confirming that all was well and that we had not mistreated him. He read part of the communiqué, but not all of it, betraying his companions still held inside to save his miserable job. At least we had gotten half of it heard on the airwaves, which we saw as a step forward. At about six in the morning we reached an agreement with the director of the prison. We would release the prisoners in exchange for two metal saws and our demands being made public, which had still failed to happen. We retrieved the saws with a rope that we put out the window and we waited to hear the demands read on the radio. Only a few minutes went by, and then Juan came to tell me they had broadcast all the demands.

“They’ve read them all out,” he informed me.

“So we can negotiate the surrender, no?”

“We can keep it up longer...” he answered, reluctant to give in.

“We’ve done what we said we would do and we have an escape plan. To keep it up any longer doesn’t make sense.”

“Okay, but we’re not going to rush it. I don’t trust them.”

We made a new call to the director and asked for the presence of a judge, the bishop of Tenerife, and members of the Red Cross as a condition of surrender. We also released three of the hostages as a sign that we were keeping our end of the bargain. Around seven, the judge and the members of the Red Cross came to the prison, but not the bishop. They notified us on the phone, and, after verifying it, we started to release the hostages, one by one. Then we went out with the last two hostages, using them as human shields. There, in the presence of the judge and the Red Cross, we handed over our knives and surrendered. It was over.

Several groups of guards moved us to the American cells in intake. After stripping us and searching us, they handcuffed us, leaving us in separate cells. I sat on the floor, contemplating the fluorescent tube on the ceiling that lit the cell. Our hopes now rested on being transferred together. This was a dubious question. What if we were separated? I hoped that it wouldn’t happen. I was musing on this when some shouting reached my ears.

“Long live the prison workers! Death to the kidnappers!”

I called to Juan.

“What?”

“You heard that shouting?”

“Yes, it’s the prisoners in intake. You know,” he added, “the refugees and the trustees.”

“It’s disgusting!”

Juan was right. It was the refugee prison and the trustees in search of praises from those who managed and controlled them in prison. It was their way of showing their absolute allegiance to their jailers, the only ones who appreciated them here. Only cowards could live without dignity or honour and demean themselves in this manner in exchange for prison benefits. Unfortunately, the prisons

were full of people like this.

At midday we were taken, one at a time, to the isolation unit by a group of guards. We were given clothes, blankets, and bed sheets, and they notified us of orders from Madrid that we were not to be allowed on the yard under any circumstances. We had to stay locked in the cells twenty-four hours a day, and in any case, every time we left the cell we were to be handcuffed. Because of all this I declared a hunger strike and I cut myself to accelerate my debilitation. One of the doctors came to stitch me up in the cell, escorted by guards.

“Tarrío, how are you doing?”

“I’m sick of this cell.”

“You’re doing more damage than you think by refusing to eat and cutting yourself,” he explained while he sewed up my veins. “Your condition is no joke, Tarrío, and any serious infection or anaemia can send you to the other side in a matter of months.”

“If you’re so concerned with my health, send me out on the yard.”

“That’s not possible, but I’ll try to get you out of your room for a while, but you’ll have to be handcuffed.”

“Try it. I can’t stand being locked up for the whole day.”

“We’ll do what we can but don’t cut yourself again. I’m going to send you some medication to relax you a bit, okay? Take it for a few days while we clear up your situation.”

The doctors managed to get me out of the cell for an hour a day, hands cuffed behind my back, but they couldn’t do the same for my companion Juan, so finally I gave up on going outside. Both of us would go out or neither of us would. However I stopped the hunger strike. I had to gather my strength to be in good shape when the transfer came.

On the peninsula, a week after our action, Juan José Garfía Rodríguez—who had recently been captured in Granada—Pablo Andrés Jiménez, and Salvador Estarlich instigated a new riot in support of our demands and in protest of the situation in the prison

at Badajoz. They had initially intended to do a kidnapping, but an error on Estarlich's part caused it to fail, and the hostages escaped. With keys in hand, he liberated Juanjo and Andrés and the rest of the prisoners in the isolation unit (among whom was *el Boca*, a well-known rapist, and the Izquierdo brothers from the massacre at Puerto Hurraco, who were taken as hostages). Near the prison at the same time there happened to be a protest, so the twenty-strong Guardia Civil riot squad lost no time in entering the prison, and bringing all the anti-riot gear to the isolation unit. The prisoners threatened to kill the hostages if the Guardia Civil intervened. No one cared about the life of a rapist or of the old killers, so the Guardia Civil attacked the uprising. They came into the unit and after a brutal beating, with no consequences for the hostages, succeeded in overpowering the prisoners. The uprising had been botched, but at least they had tried, which very few people in prison could boast of. Some prisoners reproached them for not killing Boca, but years later it was discovered that this person was innocent of the rape he was accused of. They had been right to leave him alive.

I received a visit from two inspectors from the Director General's office in Madrid. I was taken to them in handcuffs. I met them as they sat behind the desk in the director's office. I sat down.

"Well, Tarrío, what happened?" asked the one with a sing-song voice.

"What happened is that I am tired of being locked up and having you do whatever you want with me. I've spent several years in prison and I came in with a sentence of two years. That is what happened; you do nothing more than complicate my life."

"You must have provoked all this, right?"

"No, since I was first sent to prison in La Coruña I was put in cells for no reason or motive, based on previous events. I was not responsible for that, nor for the fact that after I was de-classified as Article 10 in Orense, I was put on a mixed regime or that they

classified me as first grade and sent me to Zamora.'

'We can look at your record, but I don't believe it's been like that.'

'If you say so, then I'm lying,' I said cynically.

'Where did you get the knives?' said the other one interested.

'I won't tell you that.'

'Well I have something to tell you. If we go back to Madrid knowing that you will repeat this or something like it, I give you my word we're going to put you in a hole you'll never get out of, understand?'

'Perfectly.'

'Whose idea was the kidnapping?'

'It was both of us.'

'You don't want to tell us where you got the knives?' he insisted.

'No.'

'Right then, we have nothing more to talk about.'

In the isolation unit, they began work on reinforcing security. They started to install bars on the doors of the cells and grilles covering the roof of the yard on which we'd climbed. Though we were unaware of it, they were building a bunker that was no more than a harbinger of what the Directorate General of Penal Institutions had been brewing up for several months under the direction of Antoni Asunción and his lieutenant, Gerardo Mínguez. We had access to several newspapers that commented on the kidnapping. One of them said we were in prison for several murders and rapes, which made us furious. But we understood that this formed part of the disinformation that the Directorate General had given out to the papers with the hope of discrediting us before society by making us look like murderers and rapists. One more dirty trick in the thousands they used. Juan proposed that we denounce them to the newspaper, but in the end we didn't bother. It didn't matter what everyone thought. What was important to us was to be transferred

together as soon as possible.

On 11 July, Puerto de Santa María exploded. Ernesto Pérez Barrot, Antonio Losa López, and Manuel Cabello Martínez captured the guards of unit one and holed themselves up with them in the shop. They asked the Directorate General representatives who met in Cadiz for better prison conditions in the name of APRE(r), and delivered a list of demands to be made public in the media. However, during the negotiations, Julio Romero Amador (a prisoner from Jaén who was free at the time of the hostage-taking) took the opportunity to settle a score with another prisoner, Miguel Anguita, and after opening his cell, stabbed him and then decapitated him. This sadistic act overshadowed the negotiations, crescendoing when, in a serious error, Julio Romero showed off the head of his enemy before the CCTV cameras. It ended any attempt at dialogue.

With negotiations broken down, after twenty-four hours the prisoners ended their action on their own, and although it had nothing to do with APRE(r), the association was blamed for this murder so as to discredit it. That is how, after the decapitation of this prisoner, with the full consent of the judges of Penitentiary Vigilance, the Administration started to apply the special FIES regime in Spain. The Administration used the videotape from the CCTV cameras of unit one, one of which was the image of Julio Romero displaying the head, to convince the judges of the need to take special measures with all prisoners belonging to APRE(r). These special measures would become the most serious violations of human rights and the breakdown of democracy since the PSOE took power, produced with the connivance and full approval of the executive, legislative, and judiciary bodies.

In the isolation unit of Tenerife everything continued much the same. We didn't know it, but we were to be the first to be subjected to the FIES regime, and they prepared to transfer us to jails in Badajoz and Valladolid. Some nights, bored, Juan entertained himself with

the guards inside the sentry box guarding the unit.

“Surrender!” he shouted at them underneath the cell door, “put down your batons and handcuffs, we have you surrounded!”

I would join in and help him out.

“Drop the baton and come out with your hands up, you crooks!”

We would break out laughing. These moments of humour helped us in a big way to overcome the isolation that we were being subjected to. With the exception of the exercise hour we spent twenty days without leaving those dungeons: the iron doors only open to give us food, always in the presence of a large group of guards armed with batons and iron bars. In these circumstances, the attitude of constant rebellion and the companionship we were both dedicated to, full of humour and words of encouragement, constituted our only possessions in life, along with a pair of saws and the hope of leaving this hateful, brutal underworld.

If we knew how to use it, this energy would be more than enough, since nothing is more dangerous and persistent than the courage to try and regain trampled freedom—a freedom that in some way we already had by the simple act of rebelling against the slavery of systematic obedience, thinking and acting on our own feelings, and not behaving according to psychological norms, rules, or doctrines with which we were not in absolute agreement. And that attitude made us different from other prisoners. We hadn’t situated ourselves on the margins of the law and the social system only to end up in prison and be forced to accept rules and regulations applied under coercion. A man should be a man, armed or unarmed, free or in prison. In prison there were a lot of men and women who were brave when carrying out a robbery or a hold-up, but who became incapable of maintaining themselves with dignity before a simple guard. This led to us having serious verbal confrontations with the prisoners who took on the role of construction workers in exchange for miserable pay. They made changes to the roof over the yard and placed more bars on the doors of the cells: prisoners

burying the others alive to improve their own situation and to get their freedom as soon as possible, even at the expense of others.

Look at the human pain, o monster!
Inhuman... frozen... mechanical
Just a beast.
Cruel instrument of man against man.
Sticky placenta you sow terror
in the gestation of agonising dawns.
In the darkness of your entrails.
You fabricate eternal pain and loneliness,
and blood turns to ice, without love or the present.
Only a pig's eye is left, scrutinising your insides:
Yes, I'm here!
You spit out the corpses of the weak dead,
lined up in glass tombs.
How did they get inside your belly?
Madness... dementia... unreason...
A mortal abyss to the collective suicide of feeling,
which you invite us to daily,
when in the darkness you hunt the man who suffers and
weeps.
Essence of evil,
red blood remembered in dreams,
where humans have erased the word mercy.
Also erase all love from your hearts!
Beast!,
now the children you bore are ready to see the light,
the chains of their prison and their fear broken.
Run, outlaws, run!
Don't let your mother's pimps catch you:
they would domesticate your soul and make you its slaves.

On the 23rd of August, I had just finished eating when a group of guards came to the cell.

“Tarrío, get your belongings together. You’re being transferred.”

I told Juan the news and packed my belongings in a couple of bags they had given me.

I was euphoric to be leaving that place, since we had spent a month completely locked down. The time to act definitively had arrived, to complete the second phase of our plan: the escape. They took me in handcuffs to admissions, where I was put in one of the American cells. I decided to walk around it, enjoying a cigarette while they brought my comrade Juan. They brought him in cuffs and put him in the neighbouring cell. We greeted each other without talking, though I gave him half the money I had through one of the guards. We were both very tense.

About an hour later, a pair of Guardia Civil came to get us. A third waited inside the van that would take us to the port. The one in charge, a corporal, gave me the impression of being arrogant and cocky, full of himself. He tried to impress us, so I figured he was cocky. This could benefit us, since it was this kind of guard who was most likely to underestimate prisoners, considering it enough to merely carry a gun and wear a green uniform. After having our fingerprints, guaranteeing our delivery to the State Security Forces, they handcuffed us and took us one by one to the van, where there were two other prisoners. We introduced ourselves. One was a Colombian and the other English. They were being taken to Carabanchel to be deported back to their countries of origin. Once the paperwork was completed we drove to the port of Tenerife, while we talked excitedly. We arrived in front of an enormous ocean-going vessel, the *J.J. Sister*. In front of the van was a metal bridge that connected with the car deck inside, guarded by several Guardia Civil armed with sub-machine guns. We were given priority and brought into the large parking area. Once there, they brought us one by one to the cells below, situated beside the engine and below the water

line. They put all four of us in one cell, which had a berth and two chairs, since the adjacent cell was occupied by two other prisoners coming from Puerto de Santa María (who were destined for Salto del Negro, the prison in Las Palmas).

Juan knew them and started to talk to them through a hole in the wooden wall between the two cells. Meanwhile I studied the cell and paid particular attention to the two chairs that had been brought in for us to sit on, until the prisoners were taken off at Las Palmas, when the two of us would be taken to the vacant cell. Both chairs had several steel plates that were welded in to hold the legs in place. I went to the toilet and extracted the saw from its hiding place. I turned one of the chairs over and began to cut off two of the plates, which would serve as knives for my companion and me. I asked Juan to keep watch on the guards' cabin situated just in front, two metres from our own while I sawed. Once I had finished sawing, Juan did his own while I kept watch. When we were finished we hid them both inside one of the mattresses of the berth. They would become two good knives. We were going to need them. Juan called me aside and we went into the washroom to talk.

"José," he said, "I don't trust either of the two guys who are with us, so we should keep an eye on them."

"Don't worry, what can they do? We have to do the whole trip together, and what's more I don't think they are the type to rat us out."

"Yes, but in any case we have to be alert. I don't like them..."

This distrust was common in Juan and many other prisoners, since they had been the victims of prisoners snitching in exchange for benefits. The authorities were dedicated to generously rewarding these vile acts, which gave them eyes and ears everywhere, especially where its guard dogs' eyes and ears couldn't reach. It was the same system that the police used on the outside with criminals. They allowed the traffickers to act with impunity, guaranteeing their business while they informed on all their regular clients and especially on the

money they spent. If a large purchase coincided with a robbery, then they had the culprit. No institution, not even prison, could function without its network of informants who were rewarded generously. When they needed to know something about a prisoner or keep a close eye on him, all they had to do was rouse a traitor who—under the guise of companionship—could make him talk, or simply put them in the same cell. It was a sad fact, but nonetheless something real and ongoing, even though it was a minority of prisoners who acted like this. It created a climate of distrust, but we made sure our travelling companions didn't warn them.

We set sail from Tenerife with a stop in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. There, several Guardia Civil came aboard to get the two prisoners who occupied the adjacent cell. We bid them friendly goodbyes. Then we set sail again for the port of Cádiz. Once on the high seas they put on the handcuffs through the food hatch and brought Héctor Chivita and I to the next cell, where they took the handcuffs off through the other hatch. Juan and William Humphries stayed in the other cell, from which the guards took the two chairs. They didn't notice that the two plates were missing; this gave us some satisfaction. I would have preferred to travel with my companion Juan, but this way we could keep an eye on the prisoners that accompanied us, which was also important.

Juan passed me the plates through the hole in the wall between the two cells. I hid them underneath the mattress of the bed I had taken. Both bunks were the same, and the only difference was a metal step that served to reach the top bunk. The washroom was the same as in the other cell, so that, from the portholes they both had, we could see from one to the other. The window of the portholes was a hard thick plastic and there was a small corridor between the cells and the cabin of the escort, which now just consisted of two Guardia Civil agents. Through the portholes we confirmed that the doors of the cells were locked by a thick steel bar laid across the metal door though a hinge welded to one end. The bar went into a

catch welded on the other side of the door, which had a hole in it though a padlock secured the bar. It looked like it had been made in the Middle Ages. It was a rudimentary but effective method that no one had managed to work around to escape. Apart from the bunks, there was also a pair of fans in the ceiling. This tiny space, two metres long by one metre wide, would be our whole universe for two days. We almost could not move around, so that when one got up the other would lay in bed and vice versa.

In a little while they came to take us out, one at a time, to retrieve our wash-bags from our luggage. When my turn came, they handcuffed me and opened the cell. The two guards took me to the cabin where they had stored our belongings, which we weren't allowed to have with us. I crouched down and looked for soap, toothpaste, and a toothbrush. The corporal tried to provoke me:

"Listen you, I want to have a calm voyage, you understand me?"

I whirled around surprised and looked at him. I didn't understand where this conceit came from, so I just gave him a smile.

"Don't look at me like that, I have dealt with worse than you..." he insisted.

Then I understood. He was provoking me just to show off to his companion (whose age suggested he was new to the force). He was cocky, but a big strong cocky guy with a 9mm, so I didn't respond to his provocations. After getting my wash things, they took me back to the cell.

Soon the food came. It was delivered by the guards on plastic trays through the door hatches. When the guard leaned in to put the tray on the ground to deliver it, I noticed on his right hip the butt of a pistol under the belt of his trousers. Once on board, he dressed as a civilian as required by ship rules. The captain didn't want the passengers knowing there were prisoners on board so as not to worry them. I said to Juan,

"Hey, check out this guy's waist."

He looked and saw it.

“Is the other one carrying a gun?” he asked me.

“I suppose so, but I haven’t seen it.”

“So one each...”

“Of course...” I answered, encouraged.

After eating we talked through the hole in the wall and Juan told me his plan. It involved trying to cut the bolts that held the catch for the bar and padlock, whose nuts were on the inside. If we succeeded in sawing these nuts, the catch would give way with the padlock and bar, freeing the door. Then we would need to seize the escorts using the knives and escape after we reached the port. The idea was feasible. Now we just had to see if the steel was soft and if we could cut it easily. If it wasn’t, it would make the operation more difficult. We would have to work hard at it due to the four bolts on the wall being in a difficult position. Another problem was the welding that fixed these bolts to the metal plate frame of the door, but we were confident we could saw through it before arriving at the port of Cádiz. We didn’t delay any longer and started to saw calmly, since the deafening noise of the engines prevented anyone from hearing us. We also got the two prisoners with us to watch the guards’ cabin, which they did with no problem. This provided us with complete peace of mind to do our work.

We stopped at dinner time. We both had blisters on our hands, but the really bad thing was the fact that we had barely gotten started: a bad sign. We ate in silence. Meanwhile I observed the Colombian, my cabin-mate, and the truth was that he didn’t inspire confidence in me either. He was frightened and this could be dangerous. We decided not to cut any more until the next day, since the engine noise was not as intense during the night. However, I took the time to put a sharp edge on both plates while Juan lay down and tried to recuperate from a cold he had gotten a few days earlier, which had weakened him and given him a fever. While I sharpened these bits of steel, I thought of the weapon that I had seen the guard carrying. I went to sleep with the idea of being armed with this gun and the

two crude but lethal knives hidden under the mattress.

The next day we resumed our activity after breakfast. We continued sawing again until lunchtime. Our hands were raw, full of fresh blisters, and I had only managed to cut one of the bolts. Juan had given up, since he could no longer hold the saw. He was in the cell on the right of me, so he had to cut using his left hand, and he was right-handed. We started to doubt that we could do it, since it was not as easy as we first believed it would be. We discussed it through the hole:

“Juan, it’s not going well. We can’t cut through the welds on the bolts...”

“We can grab them when they open the door in Cádiz and leave with them both as hostages,” he suggested.

“It’s not that easy Juan. There will be other Guardia Civil waiting for us there, not counting the customs officers and they’re not going to open up until the van is ready.” I paused and then went on. “What’s more, they open up the cells one by one, and even if one of us succeeds in grabbing them, it will still be difficult to get to Cádiz. We have too much history, Juan.”

“Well we have to take them however we can...”

Eventually, I stopped cutting through the terrible bolts. We explored the wooden ceiling, which we destroyed in hopes of getting to the Guardia Civil’s cabin, but once we tore the cover off of it, we ran into several rows of thick wooden boards that blocked our access. We couldn’t cut them, since the saws were so small compared to the thickness of the boards. It was making me desperate. I fell into bed on my back, soaked in sweat, and lit a cigarette. After all we had done to get here we didn’t deserve to be delivered to the next jail by this pair of fools as if we were just baggage.

We ate in silence. With our stomachs full, Juan fell into bed to finish recovering from his cold while I talked with the Colombian. He seemed more relaxed, since our attempts were finished and our journey would finally be calm. He told me his story. He had arrived

in Spain to sell drugs and had been caught and arrested at the first deal. He came from a poor family in Colombia and had done it to try to escape their poverty. It was a story that resembled hundreds of South Americans in prison, especially women; the big traffickers used them to smuggle drugs into Spain and the rest of Europe. Then, if one of them was arrested, they were left on their own while the traffickers enjoyed their luxurious mansions and expensive cars and continued exploiting these men and women who lived in misery. In jail, there were a lot of people who, if they had had a fair wage, a steady job, and a dignified life would never have ended up there. But that is life: if it wasn't a drug trafficker exploiting you, it was a boss or a soldier or a politician.

The afternoon went by without incident. Around eight they served us dinner and we ate hungrily. Juan continued to rest up in bed, and I lay down listening to music on a walkman that my companion had lent me. If we didn't think of anything by tomorrow, we would be taken to Puerto 1 and from there to the newly opened Special Regime where they would bury all our victories and rebellions in prison. We had to get out of here, but how? I fell asleep thinking about it.

On the 25th of August 1991, we ate breakfast and weighed up the different options we had, which all revolved around the need to kidnap the escorts or take the guards hostage in Puerto 1, and if not, going back to prison to carry out another action. We reached no conclusion. Around dinnertime, nine hours before the *J.J. Sister* was due to reach the port of Cádiz, we came up with a new idea.

"Hey, José," called Juan through the hole in the wall, "I'm going to burn the plastic on the spyhole to try and open the food hatch, to see if we can force the padlock."

"What about the Guardia?" I asked.

"I don't think they're there."

This idea finally gave me the one I was looking for.

"Do you have a notebook in there with a wire binding, Juan?"

“Yes.”

“Well, use the wire and make a hole in the plastic on the service hatch, then try to push the wire through and open the lock of the hatch with it. The other way there might be a lot of smoke and we wouldn’t have much time...”

“Fuck it, let’s try.”

Then, improvising, we made a new plan and got to work. Juan managed to get a good-sized wire, and I beat on the cell door hard to make sure our escorts weren’t there at the time. No one responded to the blows. They were likely eating or something, reassured by the proximity of the port of Cádiz. What could a couple of defenceless unarmed prisoners locked in two dungeons possibly do?

This underestimation was all we needed at this point.

Improving on the initial idea of the notebook wire, my companion made a kind of big hook from a mattress spring. As I had suggested, with the help of a lighter, Juan perforated the thick plastic of the porthole with one end of the spring made red hot. Once we had broken through, my companion signalled to me through the glass to go to the hole we used for communication.

“José,” he said, “split both the knives in two and put them in one of the hollow tubes of the stepladder. You’ll have to cut it. That way the prybar will be more sound...”

“Okay, I’ll do it now. Will you be able to open the spyhole?” I asked him.

“I think so.”

“Come on, champ!”

Following his instructions, I cut one of the aluminium steps from the bunk. Then I broke the knives in half and put three of the four inside the tube, making a prybar. The fourth piece, about 10cm long, would be our knife. I looked out the spyhole again and showed Juan the bar with a big smile. Now that my part was done, it was up to him to do his. Putting the point of the wire through the plastic hole he ably manoeuvred it towards the catch for the food hatch.

After a few attempts he managed to get it in but not through, which he needed to do to pull on it. He tried again but it slipped out. We were getting desperate. Patiently, covered in sweat, my companion tried again. He managed to get the catch, pull the wire, and this time it gave way, opening the hatch. Quickly, not losing a second, he stuck his arm out and opened up mine. We got the bar into the padlock of the door and prying it from side to side we managed to force that fucking lock. Juan left the cell and took the knife I had, heading quickly towards the guards' cabin. There was no one inside, so he ran back to my cell and forced the lock open, freeing me. We had succeeded!

Freed, we searched the guards' cabin looking for weapons, but didn't find any there. So we assumed they had taken their guns with them.

"Juan, these guys are armed. We have to be careful," I warned him.

"Be cool. We're going to wait for them here and jump them. You use the bar and make sure they don't use their guns. I'll try to grab them."

"Look if there's any problem, stab them without thinking, ok? Because they'll kill us."

"I'm fine with that..."

We crouched down behind the door of the cabin to wait. I was afraid, which would help me. Fear is the sixth sense, and controlled properly it helps humans develop our capacity to survive, functioning at our upper limit; epinephrine, norepinephrine, and endorphins shoot out into the endocrine system, producing the effect commonly known as adrenaline, increasing our strength and speeding our reflexes. I knew that if we didn't act simultaneously and effectively, it could cost us a bullet in the body and the failure of the escape. Nonetheless we had plenty of confidence that we could succeed. We were counting on the element of surprise, but it was all still up in the air. Barely five minutes had passed until we heard the

noise of footsteps coming down the stairs to the cabin.

"They're here, José," warned Juan in a low voice.

We hid behind the door with the metal bar and the blade and prepared to act. Juan's presence calmed me, giving me all the confidence in the world. I had at my side the best companion one could wish for in this occasion, a true man of action. When the door opened we rushed like predators, knocking onto the ground the Guardia who had entered. While Juan pressed a knife to his throat, I restrained his arms and searched him looking for his gun. He was unarmed.

"He's not carrying."

"Where's your partner?" Juan asked him.

"Up above, in the cabin we have on deck..." answered the young Guardia Civil, frightened.

"And the guns?" we asked him.

"In the cabin above, locked up. The captain doesn't allow us to carry them here."

We picked him up after putting handcuffs on him. He had pissed himself and his trousers were wet.

"Do you want to change them?" offered Juan.

"No, it doesn't matter."

We made him sit down at a chair and tied his legs to it. Then we took the money from his wallet and went to talk to the other prisoners.

"Do you want to escape with us?" we invited them.

"No thanks, we'll be released soon anyway..." was the answer both of them gave us. The Colombian looked white with fear.

I offered them some tobacco and after giving them a light, we put them in one of the cells, jamming the door with one of the broken padlocks. Then we went back out to wait for the second guard who, according to his partner, was still waiting above. Meanwhile, we talked to him again.

"What cabin are you in up there?"

“Seventy-seven.”

I got his wallet out again and looked in it. His name was Manuel Jesús Plasencia and he was doing his military service in the Guardia Civil. Along with his ID was a picture of a girl.

“Is that your girlfriend?”

“Yes,” he answered, visibly disturbed by my intrusion into his private life.

“Relax, here,” I said to him, putting the wallet back in his shirt pocket.

I knew perfectly what he was feeling at that moment.

“Well,” Juan warned him, “now we’re going to get your companion. If you shout or try to warn him, you’ll be a dead man. Got it?”

“Yes.”

We searched the cabin and found our prison documents and started reading the bullshit written about us by the psychologists and the rest of the students of human behaviour. We found out that Juan was a dangerous paranoiac and that I wrote letters to judges with the intention of escaping. We also found several letters that had never been delivered to us. When we got tired of laughing and reading them, we destroyed them all, in particular the photographs of us, so as not to leave a photograph of ourselves for them to use. We started to get uneasy at the lateness of the Guardia, and began to suspect the worst. I lit one cigarette after another while time passed slowly and the tension grew gradually, along with an immense excitement produced by the unknown.

“I’m sure they know the story, José, and they’re waiting for us up there.”

“Easy, Juan, and don’t move from the door, he could show up at any moment.”

He showed up some hours later, around six. Just as he opened the door, we swarmed him and took him down to the floor, knife at his throat. I patted him down quickly, but like his partner he

was unarmed. Cautious, he had left his gun in the cabin and the keys at the reception. We handcuffed him and put him in the empty cell, where we tied him to the bed, but not before robbing him of 20,000 pesetas, which we split, along with the 10,000 we had taken from the other Guardia. Then we tied his companion beside him, and left them locked in the cell, which we closed with the padlock. I looked through the spyhole at the corporal for a little while. Now he was a defeated and submissive hero, and he knew how easy it would be for me to abuse him, frightened and undefended. I had promised myself that I would make an example of him for being cocky, but that would bring me down to his level, and killing him would only give us problems when we were on the run, since after such a humiliation, the Guardia Civil would not stop looking for us until we were dead and buried. I was sure that Santiago Rivera Rodríguez would refrain from antagonizing men in chains or making them the object of his bravado from then on.

Once inside the cabin they previously occupied, we changed clothes with the intention of throwing them off track. I put on a pair of blue trousers, the shoes of one of the Guardia and a black and white shirt topped off with a navy-issue cap. I shaved in a mirror and admired my sea dog vibe: irresistible. Juan put on some jeans, some beach shoes, a green shirt, and a baseball cap that hid his baldness, and brushed his remaining hair. Around eight in the evening, the strong motors of the *J.J. Sister* grew silent. We had arrived at the port.

I put a change of clothes in a bag that I borrowed from one of the Guardia, along with a street map, and put it on my shoulder. We followed several passengers to the exit and went up some winding stairs to the fourth deck. We thought about forcing the door of cabin 77, but the large number of passengers walking the corridors made us desist. In any case, going unarmed definitely made the situation more relaxed for the security forces of the State, since it wasn't the same thing to be looking for two escaped prisoners as for two armed escaped prisoners. On the fourth floor of the immense

ocean-going vessel, we split up, coming together again at the waiting room, mingling with the rest of the passengers. We waited impatiently while the gangway into customs was lowered onto the boat to get to customs across a bridge.

About twenty minutes had gone by when the gangway, now connected to the bridge that gave access to customs, was lowered, and the doors of the waiting area opened up, showing us freedom. The sensation was overwhelming. I was stunned when a group of Guardia Civil appeared and crossed the bridge, heading quickly towards the ship. I looked immediately at Juan, who was a few metres away. We didn't have time to talk but we both knew that if they came for us we had to take some passengers hostage and negotiate a way out with them. We could not give up now. When they arrived at the gangway, they crossed it, entered the waiting room, and approached the reception. There were six of them and they talked with the receptionist in a relaxed manner, which put us at ease. If they only knew! The loudspeaker made an announcement, and after thanking us for choosing to travel with this ship, gave us word that we could leave. We were among the first to disembark. While we crossed the bridge we watched a big group of Guardia Civil at the entrance to the car deck, guarding the bridge that opened onto it. At the end of the gangway, which was caressed by a sea breeze, another two Guardia stopped two passengers and asked them for identification.

"José, if they stop us, I'll grab one and you get his gun."

"The one on the right..." I suggested.

We advanced towards the customs office, prepared to go into action, but they didn't detain us, so we went downstairs to an enormous room with a counter, behind which sat three Guardia Civil checking the bags of all the passengers. One of them called me over.

"Sir, may I see inside your bag please?" he asked me in a friendly manner.

"Yes, of course," I answered, opening the bag and taking out the

contents, which he looked over.

“Thank you and have a good trip,” he added, marking the bag with some white chalk.

“Don’t mention it.”

I walked quickly to the outside of the building. I looked for my companion Juan and he was there at the end of the bar. He had not gone on with the rest of the passengers as someone else might have done, but waited to see if I had any problems that he could help me out with, even if he risked his freedom, something it had taken him eleven years to get this close to. This gesture showed some of his main qualities: caution, solidity, and camaraderie. Once together, we left the building and immediately took a taxi, which took us towards the town of Puerto de Santa María. At first we had envisioned kidnapping the driver mid-journey, locking him in the trunk and taking the car straight down the motorway to Seville, without losing any time. But we changed our minds: we both worried about a checkpoint at the entrance to Seville. We stopped in Puerto de Santa María and paid the taxi driver. We wandered through the town and went to a cafe to get some things. We bought some sandwiches, bottles of water, oranges, and tobacco for me. I started to laugh, surprised when the cigarette machine talked to me and said thanks when giving me my change. With all this in a bag, we headed to the outskirts, crossed some fields, and with night falling, went inside an enormous country property where we built a small shelter with branches and leaves, camouflaged in the bushes. No one would look for us there. Now we were finally free. I patted my comrade, showing my joy.

“We showed those fuckers, huh?” I joked with him.

“Yes, but we still have to get out of here.”

“We’ll win, you’ll see...”

We took out the map and some food. While we ate we compared the possibilities that the local streets gave us. We agreed to steal a car and go to Seville. We would do it at night, at about five in the

morning, at which time the patrols would be most relaxed due to tiredness.

“What do you want to do, Juan?” I asked my comrade, lying on my back.

“I think we could to rob a bank in Seville to get money and disappear for a while... You?”

“I have a commitment to some good friends in jail. I want to help them get out and go somewhere in Latin America where I’ll be forgotten about... Anyway, I’ll help you rob a bank in Seville, since I need the dough too.”

“We have to stay in contact, since I have friends in prison too, and we’ll be better able to help them together. We’ll get revenge for all the wrongs they did to us in that shithole...”

I was free. After four years of continual isolation, locked in small concrete spaces, my lungs were on fire, filled with the joy of pure air; my eyes, punished by the white limewash and the grey walls, again contemplated trees and birds that fluttered about, looking for a place to nest for the night that—sweet as I had never suspected—came to relieve us from the heat of the day. This reunion with nature was like understanding the beauty of a flower and stopping to contemplate it, as it revealed—with the extraordinary delicacy of its colour—its perfume. How could they jail a person in a cold three metre wide cell, depriving him of this for years? What was a worse crime, to punish a human with this cruelty, or the simple theft of some property, of a *thing* whose worth changed daily on the market? Only at this moment did I understand the true pain that had been inflicted on me, not only by the imprisonment, but for the things they had killed inside of me. Prison was a vile and repugnant crime, the worst crime imaginable that someone could commit, but committed in the name of justice and society.

We stayed hidden there for two days. The heat became unbearable, and the mosquitoes, hundreds of them, picked us to pieces. Our whole bodies were covered in insect bites. The night of the second

day, I convinced Juan to abandon this place and go into town to rob a car. We left and crossed several fields before stumbling upon the railway. We continued walking along the tracks until we came to some factories.

“We can’t go down here, José, they can see us.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Let’s go check out these houses,” he pointed at the area near the highway, “Let’s see if there is a car we can steal.”

“All right, let’s go,” I agreed.

We crossed a field of watermelons and skirted along a two storey building beside the highway. Juan forced open one of the windows and went inside while I kept guard.

He soon called me.

“It’s empty, come on in, there’s food...”

I went in. It was a bar and I couldn’t believe it was empty since it was full of drinks, machines, and food. I felt unsure inside this place. I didn’t like it. Juan jumped over the counter and I searched the kitchenette where I armed myself with a knife, when suddenly the lights of the bar came on and we heard noises on the upper floor. I was scared:

“Juan, let’s get out of here, I don’t like this...”

“Should we go upstairs and see who’s there?” he asked.

“Fuck that, let’s go!” I exclaimed, heading outside.

I forced the window open and helped my companion get out of there. If they had called the police, we would have problems, and we couldn’t stay inside the bar since we weren’t sure that they hadn’t heard us coming in and called the police already. We hid in the garden of a cabin, hoping that they wouldn’t look for us there and so that we could try and steal the car that was parked there. Meanwhile we looked for a way into the house so we could detain the occupants, get the keys of the car, change our clothes, shower, and eat something. But all the windows had bars. We approached the car; I opened it using a saw and let myself inside. However, we

didn't succeed in starting it or breaking the anti-theft device, so we abandoned it. Finally, as a last resort, we decided to wait until morning for them to open the door of the house to get inside. Day broke, and several hours passed without the door opening. Staying there was dangerous, as was trying to get back to the field. We were definitely having no luck, which was a bad omen. I had a bad feeling so I decided to split up with Juan right there.

"Juan, I'm taking off on my own," I explained to him, "Together we run too much of a risk, and apart we have a better chance of succeeding and helping the others."

"Agreed. Where will we meet up again?"

"In La Coruña. Do you know the Chinese Gardens?"

"Yes..."

"Well, there, in front of a statue of Rosalía de Castro with an eagle and a snake."

"On December 1st we'll meet there, all right?"

"Until then Juan, be careful."

"Good luck."

We parted with a firm handshake. I followed the train tracks towards Rota and crossed through the industrial zone, crouching down between the bushes on the far side of the tracks. Then I walked through the fields, keeping an eye on the highway to keep my bearings. It was hot, very hot, and I felt choked and drained. I spent several hours exposed to the 40°C heat of the Cádiz sun and had walked about thirty kilometres. Now there were only twelve more to reach Rota. I stopped to catch my breath, under the shade of a solitary tree, unable to take another step. Nearby there was a small hole with a little dirty water, in which there were some insects and maybe a tadpole. I went towards it and using my shirt as a filter, drank a little of the water, which I was thankful for though it tasted disgusting. Then I went back to the shelter of the tree and fell down. History was repeating itself. To escape was again my only possible freedom. But flee—to where? Where were the free lands

in which justice made us all equal and where no one persecuted or incarcerated anybody else?

I observed the countryside at length. I wasn't free; I was just a rebel who had escaped from the yoke of those who controlled us through systems and laws. I would not be free while all over the face of the earth there existed other men ready to knock me down or to jail me and chain me up. I would not be free while a cold prison cell awaited me.

Part Four: The Path of Repression

*I have often heard you speak of one
who commits a crime as though he were not
one of you, but a stranger and
an intruder in our world. But I say to
you that even as the most holy
and the most righteous cannot rise
beyond the highest which
is in each one of you, so
the wicked and the weak cannot fall
lower than the lowest which is
also in each of you.*

Khalil Gibran

San José de Calasanz, La Coruña, November 1979

The taxi stopped in front of the immense school. An old building, the boarding school of San José de Calasanz seemed nothing short of hell to me. I was frightened by the cold, grey look of this state school. From now on it was taking charge of my tutelage and education, while at home they tried to solve money problems and my parent's relationship. I got out of the taxi holding my mother's hand, whose face held tremendous pain. With the miserable salary she got for scrubbing other people's floors, she could not feed four mouths, let alone the extra cost of educating her boys. She had no choice and was suffering because of it. We hurried up the steps to the entry door. My mother rang the bell on the heavy wooden door and after a short wait an ancient security guard opened the door.

"Hello, good morning" she greeted.

"Good morning," answered my mother politely. "I've brought my son. I'd like to speak with the principal first..."

"We were waiting for you; the Guardianship of Minors told us you were coming today. Come in," she invited us.

We walked through a dining room and several hallways that emitted a strong smell of detergent towards the principal's office. The principal's name was Doña Petra.

"Hello," she greeted my mother. "Is this your son José?" she asked, patting my head.

I avoided the caress.

"He's a little shy," my mother excused me, tossing my hair.

"That'll pass. We have a lot of boys here, and he'll soon make friends."

They finished the bureaucratic formalities of turning me over to the custody of the school. After a couple of signatures, the dreaded moment came. We had to separate until she could once more take charge of me and bring me home for good. I knew that the responsibility for this decision lay with my father, a man trapped by alcohol, whose sole preoccupation in life was to get drunk and visit whores then come home drunk and hit my mother.

"Son, I have to go. Promise me you'll behave well," she asked me, trying to contain the tears that fought to break out of those chestnut eyes.

I noticed her hands were cold, damaged by detergents and work, as they caressed my neck when I hugged her in a vain attempt to delay the inevitable.

"Take care of him, please," she pleaded with the principal.

"We'll do that, ma'am, but you have to go now or it'll be worse for him..."

"Goodbye, son," she said, kissing me, "I'll come see you soon."

"Goodbye, mama," I whispered.

When my mother left through the door of the office, I felt an emptiness surround me: the brutal sensation of the immensity of entering a new world. One of the nuns took charge of me and brought me to the third floor where the dormitories were. She assigned me a small locker with the number twenty-three—the number that would be written on all my clothes and belongings. I was also assigned one

of the forty beds in the dorm, which were in four lines of ten, with corresponding locker numbers. The showers and toilets were at the far end. The dormitory was cold, with no heating. It was lit by some fluorescent tubes in the ceiling. I felt alone and started crying bitterly despite the efforts of the nun to comfort me.

At dinnertime, they brought me down to dinner in the canteen, on the lower floor. There were about twenty tables, some of which were empty. The rest were occupied by groups of boys, who stopped eating for a minute to observe me with curiosity. They showed me to a table with three other kids my age; from then on they would be my table companions. I felt out of place and uncomfortable, and could barely eat, which they let go as it was my first day.

Once we had finished eating, we went in groups to the dormitory for a siesta. We had to brush our teeth and wash our hands before getting into bed, and once there, they walked away, leaving the dormitory door closed and the older ones in charge. When we were alone, my neighbour, who was at the same dining table as me, spoke:

“What’s your name?” he asked in a low voice.

“José,” I answered from the bed.

“My name is Ángel. Are you an orphan?”

“No. They brought me here because of problems at home...”

“I don’t have any parents and I’ve been here for years. Do you want to be my friend?” he offered.

“Yeah!” I said, accepting.

That afternoon, a couple of hours later, they came to take us to the classrooms located on the second floor, alongside the chapel. I was in grade five, along with my new friend. Having a friend made me more comfortable. The classes were given by a teacher called Don Jorge, who—Ángel told me a moment before we went into the classroom—had the bad habit of hitting students with a rubber hose that he always had in his hand. My first day in class was a test, so I stayed sitting at my desk without doing anything. Once the classes

finished, it was recess time and we went down to the yard. It was big and concrete, and lay in front of the canteen, adjoining the kitchen and the gardens that separated it from the football pitch. There was a basketball court, even though no one played the game, preferring marbles or other group games (like the popular rock, paper, scissors). I felt shy, so I went towards the steps that led to the football field and sat on them to watch the other children playing. Ángel and two of his friends came to keep me company.

“Hey, José,” he greeted me, sitting down beside me.

His friends did the same. Ángel was about twelve or thirteen years old. Thin and sickly looking, this kid with dark eyes and an open smile would become my accomplice, a brother, for the rest of my stay here.

“This is Juan and Miguel,” he introduced the twins.

We shook hands.

“Are you going to be staying here long?” asked Miguel.

“I don’t know,” I answered, “my parents are having problems at home and until they sort it out I don’t think they’re coming to get me, except to go home for the occasional weekend.”

“Same as us,” said Juan.

“Come on, let’s go play marbles,” proposed Ángel, offering me some of his.

“No, I don’t feel like it...”

“Come on...” he insisted, taking me by the arm and bringing me to a small square of concrete where some other children were playing.

I took the marbles he offered and we played until it was dinnertime, when the nuns who watched us from their seats ordered us to go into the canteen.

Immediately after dinner we were taken back to the dormitory. We brushed our teeth and went to bed under the supervision of three nuns, Doña Pepita, Señorita Nieves, and Doña Conchita, this last one being the worst of them, as time would tell. Once we were

all in bed, the lights went off and the door was locked. Even though it was forbidden to talk, Ángel said goodnight to me.

“Good night,” I said back in a low voice.

I tried to fall asleep but it would not come. A knot of pain crushed my throat and I broke out crying again, this time silently, to avoid the other boys hearing me. The dark frightened me, along with the almost tragic silence that fell over the whole dormitory, suddenly, as if the night knew the stories of every one of us. I felt alone and lost, like the rest of the children there, except I couldn’t get used to it. I thought of my mother until I fell asleep in the early hours of the morning.

San José de Calasanz was huge and consisted—in addition to the main building—of various orchards in which there were fruit trees and vegetable gardens under the care of a gardener, who was also in charge of looking after the pigs and rabbits for the school. The whole complex of concrete and fields was surrounded by walls that were high (for a child) and had broken glass cemented into the top—with the clear purpose of stopping it from being climbed. This was the first time that I experienced the unbearable feeling of helplessness that I got from being held against my will.

In the mornings, when we got up, we had to go to our respective lockers and wait there until Doña Conchita opened them, to get to our towels and soap to go wash ourselves. We then had to make our beds and make sure nothing was out of place; if there were, we had to make it again and again until they were happy with it. They were in the habit of hitting the most undisciplined ones or those who simply didn’t know how to make the bed properly, or those who wet the beds, who were always the young kids.

This seemed wrong to me and soon I learned to feel hatred towards these women.

“They are sows,” Ángel would say to me when we were talking about them.

After cleaning up and making the bed without any wrinkles, we went down to the canteen. You had to eat everything they served you; if you didn't, they would make you sit at the table and they would punish you until you finished it. It was normal on most days to see some child in front of their table, crying in front of a cup of chocolate or some soup. In the classrooms, where we spent four hours in the morning and a couple in the afternoon, things were no different as regards discipline. If you didn't pay attention or did something that was considered disrespectful to the teacher, he would hit you with the hose a couple of times, or you might be punished (after a couple of slaps in the principal's office) to a week without play, on your knees, with arms extended. The orphans got the worst of it, since in the absence of a family the school didn't have to answer to anybody when they were abused, which happened all too often. They were more careful in punishing those who had families. I hated this place.

Some weekends, I went home to visit my family. My sister Emily came to pick me up after leaving a nuns' school beside San José de Calasanz, where, like me, she suffered in a boarding school. Other times my mother came to get us, except on occasions when I was being punished for some prank that was considered serious, and I had to stay in the school for the weekend, forbidden to go home. Once I asked my mother to allow my friend Ángel to come stay with us for a weekend. She talked with the principal who agreed with it, so, after making arrangements, we left this hellish place with my mother and headed towards home.

As soon as we got home, I took Ángel to meet my neighbourhood friends. We played the whole afternoon until we were exhausted and then we all went together to an old hut made from boards and cardboard, in which we had hidden some kittens recently captured by the gang. We lit a cigarette that we passed around and smoked in little puffs, celebrating being together again, and sharing some kisses with the girls in our usual game. Ángel had a great time, and the

rest accepted him right away, especially one of the girls, Sonia, who obviously had a crush on him. We teased them, making them both blush and daring them to kiss. When it got dark, we broke up until the next day and went back to our homes. At our gate, I raced my friend up the steps, and lost. We went in the door and my smiling mother met us.

“Come wash up and eat,” she ordered us. “Where have you been?” she asked in a loud voice, seeing how dirty we were, while we smiled, better friends than ever.

That night, alone in the room, tucked up in bed, we stayed awake talking about the girls and us. I proposed adopting him so he could stay with my mother after the inevitable divorce that was under way.

“Can you imagine us as brothers?” I asked him wishfully.

“That would be awesome...”

Sunday was a repeat of Saturday. Kisses, caresses, and some cigarettes, protected from the world of adults by the wooden boards of the old hut. We were scarcely aware that it would all end and we would have to go back to school again. Sharing some money we got from our parents, that afternoon we all went to the cinema to see “The Magnificent Seven,” which made a big impression on Ángel and me. On leaving the cinema we both had a bit of Chris in us. It was dark when we got back to the house. At the gate Ángel kissed Sonia goodbye, and we went hungrily up the stairs. We went to bed early that night at my mother’s insistence, since we had to get up at dawn the next day to go back to the most hated place in the world. We barely talked and we fell asleep under the strong light of the Tower of Hercules, which filtered through the window pane, intermittently illuminating the walls of the apartment.

In the morning we got up grumbling and went back to San José de Calasanz on the bus. There in the yard we met up with Juan and Miguel who were also coming back, and swapped stories. For Ángel it had been an extraordinary couple of days and I did nothing

but listen to him talk about it. These two days had been his only days of freedom. From his birth he had been in State schools. We laughed when he said he had fallen in love. The four of us formed an inseparable group and we became known to the teachers as “the musketeers.”

That night we had to take showers. We had already showered at home so we thought we had an excuse not to shower again. However, Doña Conchita made us take another shower, so after we got our towels and change of clothes from the lockers we went reluctantly to take our turn. The water was cold but we had no alternative but to put ourselves under the freezing jet. I had trouble breathing and chose to just wet my head and pretend I had showered. When I came out my trick didn't fool Doña Conchita.

“Get back in the shower again,” she ordered. “You'll be punished for lying, now get back in there.”

“The water is too cold,” I complained.

She hit me a big slap across the face, took the towel from my waist and pushed me back into the shower, keeping the door open. Under the shower tears of rage came out and mixed with the water and went silently down the drain. I tried to leave the shower, breathless from the cold water, but she pushed me back in again. Under the water she was watching me through horrible thick glasses, making me feel ashamed that I was naked and defenceless at her whim. I hated her with all my heart.

This was Doña Conchita's normal behaviour. She routinely treated us like this, especially the smallest ones and the orphans, who she towelled dried personally, even when they were big enough to dry themselves off. It was said in the school, by those who had spent the longest time there, that she liked to touch the boys and watch them naked in the showers. This seemed likely to be true after I had felt her dirty stare looking at my naked body. It was also said that some nights with the excuse of tucking in her favourite orphans she played with their penis and testicles. Of everyone there, Doña

Conchita and Doña Petra were the most hated, although the ass-kissers and informants didn't hate them.

Attending music classes with a teacher on Saturdays, I learned to play the guitar, the lute, and the mandolin, and even though I wasn't too bad I started to hate the instruments, the classes, and the teacher. We also got to play football while one of the nuns, Señorita Nieves, was kind enough to serve as the referee, running as fast as she could from one side of the field to the other. Other times we escaped the watch of the nuns and went to visit the pig pen to watch them eat and fight among themselves, biting each other viciously, which left them injured, bleeding from the ears or snout. But usually we did the same things, playing marbles, looking at the knickers of Doña Conchita when she fell asleep while sitting on a bench watching us, or, if all else failed, playing rock, paper, scissors.

One of these afternoons I got into a fight while playing marbles with another student, an orphan. He had lost most of his marbles due to my long distance throws (I was one of the best at these in the school). The row started when I hit his bowler and it left the circle we had drawn on the ground that determined the size of the playing area. This meant that I won the game along with the marble he had thrown, his favourite. He decided that his marble hadn't left the circle, but the other kids there agreed with me.

"Come on, hand it over," I said, standing up.

"It didn't leave; it stayed inside the line."

"It left, we all saw it, right?" I asked.

"It's true, it left," they answered.

"It didn't," he insisted.

Then we started fighting, trading blows until the nuns separated us. They punished us both with no playtime for a week, during which we had to spend all our breaks on our knees with our arms outstretched, imitating the image of Christ on the wall of the principal's office.

Christmas came. My mother came to get me and take me back to her house for a week. This time Ángel was not allowed to come with us, which I was upset about since we took for granted that we'd be able to spend this time together at the house.

We parted with a little sadness. At the house I talked with my mother about the possibility of Ángel coming to live with us once things were better and she had separated from my father.

"Mama, why don't we take Ángel home when I leave the school?"

"We can't, son," she answered. "I don't earn enough to keep us all in the house, let alone one more. I feel sorry for him. If we can take him for another weekend we will, but he couldn't stay."

This was a big disappointment for me. What would happen to my friend now? That night, in the clean friendly sheets of the bed in my house I remembered the coldness of the school dormitory and imagined my friend lying there, facing the empty bed I had left behind. It wasn't fair. I would work, if I had to, to help my mother so we could bring Ángel to live with us. I cursed my father; I hated him a little. I stared at the wall, observing the reflections of light that came from the Tower of Hercules, faithful companion to my childhood dreams, and understood how lucky I was to have a family to spend Christmas with.

I spent the week with my mother, sisters Emily and Yolanda, and my brother Óscar, the youngest. I loved my family, but most of all my mother, whom I adored. I had a special relationship with her, even though I was always the most rebellious of the children and was the cause of a lot of stress for her. My mother would say about me, recalling the words of my grandmother Carmen, that I had the devil in me and it was impossible for me to be calm or keep me in the house for more than an hour. I was always evading her and getting out into the streets to run around with my friends and even ran away from home twice, causing her terrible suffering. Now she was killing herself working to pay for school for my siblings as well as the expense of keeping us all dressed and paying the many

household bills. She was always working, tired, and with a sore back. This noble woman sacrificed herself to give us the best possibilities from her salary while wrestling with the hardships of life.

When Christmas was over, I went back to the boarding school again. I brought candy and sweets to share with Ángel, and told him what had happened that week and gave him my friends' regards. I also told him he couldn't come live with us yet, since my mother couldn't take care of us all, but I made sure to add that we would soon come to take him for good. I was sure my mother would change her mind. Ángel told me that Juan and Miguel had gone back home with their mother and that they probably wouldn't be coming back to see us. I heard a certain sadness in his voice. They had been his only family in that place for several years, although deep down he was glad they had gotten out of there. He shared the candy and sweets I had brought for him with the other orphans that came to ask for some, crowded around us, with the generosity that distinguishes those who have little. That morning was cold and we walked around in bulky old overcoats. It was obvious that poverty was the one thing we had in common.

The school operated with a religious ethos. Rules, not affection, were the basis of our education. The teachers and the nuns tried out new public punishments daily, with the hope that the rest would understand that discipline came before all else. We couldn't see the reasons for it, but we knew it was unfair; it made us resist. Our own nature was completely against these abuses of authority, which we were subjected to by those who were supposed to protect and guard us. Thoughts like this crowded the minds of many of the children, including those punished by their own families. None of them tried to understand children's own reasons for what they did. They presumed from the start that children only had to obey adults, nothing more, and that adults had the power to punish us in order to change our way of understanding life, moulding us into images of themselves without offering us any opportunity to make our own

decisions. Because of this, many of us longed for legal adulthood, which would mean our escape from the shackles in which the adults had imprisoned our childhoods.

Children always silence these thoughts when they are feeling oppressed and mistreated, and this silence created in us a growing hatred, which if it has no other outlet, begins to manifest itself, most of the time in violence or rebellion. Children, students or orphans, were not treated well. When the teachers didn't hit them, they were neglected or ignored; lack of affection creating an unstable atmosphere that hindered their development. Children need love, free time, friends, and constant signs of affection, not punishment and severe discipline. Those in charge were lazy with their work, and neglected the human aspect of education, using only punishment and discipline. The abuses of authority were frequent, and the youth were suddenly treated like adults; they stopped crying (realising it served no purpose), and they hardened, hating the punisher; understanding that the punishment was not from love or affection, only for authority and control. That is why the great majority of youth who have suffered in boarding schools or reformatories turn to crime on more than one occasion. Many of them are now rotting in prison, turned into dangerous criminals. The state, charged with educating them, has made them into a business. Boarding schools, orphanages, and reformatories were created to hide the problems of society, represented by disenfranchised, impoverished youth who became delinquents. By natural right, all women and men from birth should have access to the same opportunities, so they can share the same tools to face life. The words *rich* and *poor* should disappear, replaced by the word *equal*. All children of the world have a right to grow up in a decent environment, with basic general education, and with access to the best professional and educational facilities. While this doesn't happen, it is no surprise that kids who play ball in their neighbourhoods one day are opening the door to a prison cell the next, for they are already forging the chains to imprison them.

At this time of the year in La Coruña it rained constantly, so we spent most of our recesses inside. Rain made me nostalgic and I was in the habit of standing in front of the windows to watch it fall on the road and on the cars driving past with their wipers on. On days like this I missed going home to my mother and my family. This nostalgia for home started to gradually overpower me and although I was a good student and my grades had been between good and excellent, I started to have problems with my studies and was punished by Don Jorge, who began to treat me as a focal point for his anger. One day after stealing some rice from the kitchen, Ángel and I entertained ourselves by shooting it through pen tubes at the other students. It was a common game played with rice or chewed-up pieces of paper. But that day we had the misfortune that one of them landed on Don Jorge's bald head. He stood up, his face red with anger.

"Who did this?" he asked furiously.

He got no answer and came towards our desks. All of us who had participated in this little battle started hiding the pen tubes. I was trying to hide mine when he saw me. He came to the desk I was sitting at and took the pen I had hidden. He grabbed me by my hair and dragged me to the blackboard in front of everyone.

"I didn't do it!" I cried several times.

He grabbed one of the rubber pipes he used to hit us and began beating me brutally on the back and legs. I fell to the ground screaming in pain but he continued, beside himself, hitting me until he had had his fill. He then made me kneel down facing the wall and gave the class a lecture, threatening them. I cried from the blows, my tears mixing with snot, stunned by what had happened.

After class he took me to Doña Petra, the principal. I held a hope that she would believe me, but her first reaction to what had happened was a tremendous slap across my face, letting loose another flood of tears.

"Of course it was you!" she shouted at me. "You are going to

spend a week without recess on your knees in my office. Then you'll learn not to disrespect the teachers."

"I didn't do it," I managed to say between sobs.

The only response to my attempts to defend myself was another slap.

"You'll go eat now, and then go straight to the dormitory," and then she added to Don Jorge, "You can be sure it won't happen again."

"I hope not because this child is a demon."

I wanted badly to respond to this with an insult but I didn't want another slap. I went to the canteen and sat down at the table to eat. All my companions looked at me in silence. Ángel broke it:

"Did they punish you?"

"A week without play and she hit me a couple of times."

"Old hag..."

After eating we went up to the dormitory. In the bathroom while we brushed our teeth, Ángel lifted up my shirt, under which there were many red marks.

"You're bruised," he said to me.

I turned in front of the mirror and looked at my back. The marks covered my back and went down my sides. Who could I turn to for help here? The worst thing was to know that I had been made a scapegoat again, that they had beaten me twice for things I hadn't done. It was at that moment that I decided to escape from this religious hell. I said it to Ángel during siesta, hoping he would come with me:

"Should we escape?"

My friend looked at me surprised and laughed:

"You're crazy, where would we go?"

"We could go back to my neighbourhood and hide in the hut we have there. My friends could get us food and blankets..." I answered with what I thought was a magnificent plan.

"I won't go," he said seriously.

“Why not?” I had to know.

“Because if they catch us, they’ll take me to the reformatory and I don’t want to be sent there.”

He was right. If they did catch us, the worst they could do was expel me, which would suit me fine. In Ángel’s case, he would be sent to a reformatory, probably the one at Palavea, three kilometres away. We didn’t talk about it any more that day, but the idea of escaping continued to fill my mind, mischievous and constant.

I spent the whole week being punished at playtime, looking at the wall. Whenever I turned my head, a slap made me return to the initial position. One lunchtime, while watching the rain in the distance falling on the other side of the glass one of the nuns had the brilliant idea to open one of the windows. I felt the air and sensed freedom on the other side. A feeling of fear and euphoria possessed me. I just had to run, jumping out this window to the other side and continue running for as long as I could. Ángel noticed my nervousness:

“What’s going on?”

“They’ve have left a window open, you see it?”

“You’re going to escape?”

“Yes, are you coming?”

“I can’t risk it, “he confessed, “you go.”

When they started to collect the plates I was still indecisive. I hadn’t eaten anything, so I would be one of the last to leave the canteen, since I had to stay until I had finished it all. Under the table, Ángel and I held hands.

“Be careful,” he said.

Doña Conchita came to our table and looked at my plates, still full of food. She got angry.

“You, Ángel, get going,” she ordered my companion. “You stay here until you’ve finished eating it all,” she shouted at me.

Once she had moved far enough away I stood up, pushed the table quickly to the side and ran towards the window to the surprised

shouts of the nuns who watched me in amazement. On reaching the window I slipped out with the agility and speed of youth and made my escape after going down the entrance steps. On the driveway, and then in the fields, I ran like I never had before, drenched by the rain. While running I bumped into the school gardener who had a wheelbarrow full of rakes and spades, for one of the earthen driveways that led to the school.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” he shouted, surprised by my running.

I kept on going without a break until I had lost sight of the school and could run no more. I was soaked and exhausted, and took shelter from the rain under a tree, unable to take another step while my heart beat violently in my chest from the exertion. I stopped to look around at the countryside. I had succeeded.

At that time I would never have suspected that everywhere in the world there would be someone ready to persecute and jail me. I didn't know that I was a slave to laws that had been made without consulting me and I was ignorant of the fact that, eleven years later, for three days I would be one of the most wanted men in the country.

Rota, August 28, 1991

I arrived at the port town of Rota at about three in the afternoon. My feet were sore and full of blisters, since the shoes I had borrowed were a size bigger than I wore. It was painful to walk and I felt stupid because I hadn't thought of that. I was a bit dirty and dishevelled, and even though I had changed my trousers, I still looked a little suspicious. Without wasting any time, I went towards the beach after asking a hobo for directions. Nearby I found a small shop that was still open and I went in to buy soap, a razor, a comb, a bottle of aftershave, as well as a small beach towel that was on sale. I went to the showers on the beach and for ten bills they let me use one of them. I showered, shaved, and splashed on cologne. I also cleaned my shoes until they

shone. I changed my shirt for a clean short-sleeve, and went out to the beach with my pants rolled up above my knees and my shoes in my hand. I wrapped the dirty shirt and the rest up in a newspaper and threw it away like someone throwing away four years of prison.

I walked along the shore, mixing with the other people. To walk on the beach, feeling the sea on my bare feet was a promise I had made to myself years before. I loved the sea. I took a moment to buy a strawberry ice cream cone in one of the small ice cream parlours on the seafront, and continued walking, enjoying this gift I had given myself. I thought of the faces of my friends in La Coruña would make when they saw me reappear. I thought of my family and imagined the commotion my escape had caused for them, along with the manhunt of which I was now the object. My family would be suffering, but in the bottom of their hearts, they would be as glad as I was.

The years of isolation I had endured came to my mind and I felt, with a smile, the joy and hope that my escape must have produced in the friends who were still locked up in the diseased dungeons of the rotten Spanish prisons, thinking particularly of Anxo and Musta. I felt a certain hatred when I thought of the hundreds of times I had been stripped in front of quixotic, cruel guards; I thought of the prisons of La Coruña, Zamora, Daroca, and Tenerife, these instruments of torture where society punished all the brave people who had dared to oppose the system, all those men and women whose presence bothered the respectable citizens who now surrounded me, tanning themselves under the sun, smiling, unaware that others suffered so they could enjoy peaceful holidays. It was true; so that some could filthily LIVE, alienated by the doctrines of consumerism, their minds full of insane complexes, other people—over forty thousand of them—had to SURVIVE, jailed in freezing pigsties, suspended from life. The MASTERS had seized the world and it was reserved exclusively for them. The beaches were theirs, the streets belonged to them, the fields, the sky... everything was under their control and these wonders were only to be enjoyed by those who accepted their

ideology. Society was in a profound stupor, fooled by the stories of the politicians, prostrate and pale from the varnish of convenience and caution. These people never offered me any opportunities, and in truth, if they had, I wouldn't have taken them. I would prefer to live my life among the dispossessed, the thieves, the addicts, the AIDS carriers, the bank robbers... before I would live among the amorphous bourgeois with their inferiority complexes.

I left the beach and took a taxi to the post office. I sent a telegram with a pre-arranged message to my friend Musta to tell him he could count on me. Then I went to a sports shop and bought a small machete in case I failed to get a gun. I lost myself in the city and went into a bar where some workers dressed in blue overalls were eating. I sat down at one of the tables. A friendly woman, quite old, came to serve me:

"Good afternoon, what would you like?"

"I'd like some food."

"Good. We have paella, meatballs, steak with potatoes, eggs..."

"I'd like a nice veal steak with lots of potatoes and a couple of soft-boiled eggs."

"Wow, you're hungry," she said smiling, "would you like anything to drink?"

"Do you have some milk?"

"Yes."

"Well, bring me a bottle of milk please."

"Very good, anything else?"

"No, thanks."

Soon she came back with a plate overflowing with crispy potatoes, along with a steak and two eggs. Seeing it all sent my appetite sky rocketing:

"Enjoy!" said this likeable woman.

"Looks great."

I ate hungrily. The friendliness of this woman pleased me; it had been years since someone had treated me with such trust. There

were also good people in this society, truly respectable ones, people who were incapable of hurting others under any circumstances. When I finished eating, I got my dishes and went up to the bar with my plates and cutlery. I placed them on the bar, near the kitchen and sat on one of the stools. The waitress came towards me.

“Thanks, would you like anything else?”

“A *carajillo* [coffee with brandy] and the bill please.”

I paid up and drank the *carajillo*, which livened me up considerably. I then left, but not before saying goodbye to the lady:

“Until next time, ma’am. The steak was fantastic...”

“Come back whenever you want.”

In the afternoon I went to a bookshop to buy some newspapers. The news of our escape was in all the nationals and the locals, though only *ABC*, *El País*, and *El Diario de Cádiz* had photos of us. I wasn’t worried, since the photos were very old, and it would be hard to recognise me from any of them. But I was amazed to see how the state was spinning this news—surely at the bidding of the Director General—to create fear in the population, or course to encourage them to collaborate in our capture, to inform on us, and to support to the new measures that were to stop the landslide of kidnappings and escapes from prison. I took every precaution and went to a barber to get my hair cut. I then bought bandages and some tape, feigning a work accident, to try to hide the tattoos on my left hand. I also got some dark sunglasses from an eyeglass shop. I asked for directions to the bus station and walked over to it. I sat in front of the station, on a wooden bench in a park right opposite, observing my surroundings carefully. A few hours later I bought a ticket to Seville and went back to the park again to see if it produced a reaction. It all seemed normal and at nine o’clock I got on the bus to Seville along with the other passengers. We got into the city at about ten o’clock. I got off the bus after checking from the window that everything was all right. I was crossing the station when two plainclothes policemen stepped in front of me, asking for ID. Unarmed, except for the small

machete (little use in this situation) my first instinct was to run, but I knew I would not get far on feet covered with blisters. Nor could I take a hostage, since I was one of the last people to get off the bus and there was no one near me; the station was almost empty.

“I don’t have any ID,” I said to them, trying to win some time.

This annoyed them and a third man came to join them:

“Come with us.”

They took me to a small part of the station and went to advise their other companion, possibly a policeman stationed there full time.

“What’s your name?” they asked me.

“José Rodríguez López,” I said, giving them the name of an old friend of mine.

“Where are you coming from?”

“From Melilla. I’m in the army...”

They put me up against the wall and searched me. They pulled out the machete:

“And this?”

“I’m in the habit of carrying it around. We always carry one in the army.”

“And these cuts?” asked one of them looking at the old scars from self-harm.

“Things from the legion, you know, like tattoos...”

“Call the commissary and tell them what he said, along with the name he gave,” ordered one of them to another.

“I’m sure this one escaped from barracks,” he added.

They handcuffed me to a bench with my hands behind my back. When I felt the cuffs close around my wrists I cursed myself for being stupid and childish for having taken that fucking bus. I would later learn that I had been stopped and detained randomly, in a routine check in response to bomb threats that ETA had issued against Expo ‘92 in Seville in order to cause chaos in the city. By all accounts I had behaved like a novice, and this decision would

cost me dearly. This was how things were. We are never entirely sure what will happen from any decision. When the policeman hung up the phone and looked at me with a serious face, I knew I had been hunted down.

“He’s not who he says he is,” he explained to his partners. “Wait here a minute, and don’t let him out of your sight.”

He soon came back with two newspapers and opened them on the table.

“He’s one of these two,” he affirmed, not recognising me from the photo. They all looked at me, then back at the newspaper, and then back at me. They couldn’t put it together.

“What do we do with him?” asked the one who had arrived last.

“They’re coming from the station to look at him.” Saying this, he took out a pistol from his waist, and popping out the magazine, loaded some bullets into it. He put the gun back in his holster and checked to see if the cuffs were tight, then tightened them a little more. All my hopes completely disappeared as he took me outside the bus station and into a waiting police car.

They took me straight to the Identification department. While they took my prints, I saw a poster on the wall that caught my attention. There were photos of GRAPO activists, under which were enlarged photos of us. Some of the photos were crossed out with an X, which meant that they had been eliminated; others were crossed by parallel lines, horizontal and vertical, which meant they had been jailed; the rest were unmarked. I was happy to see that Juan was among the last group, so for the moment he had been spared.

Once they had identified my prints by computer and confirmed my identity, they congratulated themselves. I was sent down to the dungeons, where they took my trousers and shoes away, putting me into a cell with just my underwear. I fell onto a dirty mattress, looking at the ceiling blankly. A flimsy light barely lit up the hard walls and made the space feel smaller. I wanted to cry but resisted the urge. I could do nothing now but wait for another occasion and

escape again. It was the best I could think of.

The following morning they gave me back my shoes and trousers inside the cell and ordered me to dress. Once dressed, they handcuffed me behind my back and took me to the third floor in an elevator, which had a huge mirror in which I could see my dirty appearance. Once on the third floor I was taken to the Hold-up Brigade. There were three of them.

“Sit down there,” one of them ordered, pointing at a seat in the middle of the office.

After I sat they closed the door and surrounded me.

“Here your ‘dangerousness’ doesn’t matter, understand? You’ll do yourself a favour and answer me when I ask you a question,” said the one in charge; he was tall, with a moustache, the classic secret policeman.

“Where are your guns?” he asked me.

“What guns?” I answered with another question.

“The ones you and your colleague took from the boat.”

“We didn’t take any guns.”

He looked at one of his men.

“Bring out the bat,” he ordered him. From under a table a wooden baseball bat was produced and passed to the chief. Now with the stick in his hand he asked me again.

“Let’s see if my hearing’s bad. Where are the guns?”

“We didn’t take any guns from the boat,” I answered again. “Ask them, you’ll see.”

He thought for a moment, and his next act was to order one of his men to call the Guardia Civil, which confirmed what I had said. He continued interrogating me:

“Where is your friend?”

“I don’t know.”

“Where did you split up?”

“In Cádiz, after getting off the boat.”

“You’re lying.”

I didn't respond to this, since they knew I wouldn't tell them the truth or direct them to the possible whereabouts of my companion; my silence answered for me.

"Tell me where Redondo is or I'll crack your head open," he threatened me, lifting the bat above my head.

"I don't know."

He made a move to hit me. I closed my eyes, waiting for the impact, but it didn't come. It was a bluff.

"You don't seem as fierce as they say you are in the papers and on the TV, Tarrío," said the policeman behind me, slapping my head.

He was mocking me, but I didn't rise to his provocation. Finally, convinced they would get nothing out of me in this interrogation, they put the bat away and let my state attorney in, so they could take a statement from me. It was laughable that those in charge of protecting the law were scumbags, cowards experienced in the most diverse techniques of repression and torture. In other circumstances I would have been beaten thoroughly; now it was impeded by the presence of the lawyer in the office, and my scheduled appearance before the judge. Who would have known that just three years later these three state mercenaries—José Antonio García Candel, José Antonio *Macuca*, and the boss, José Antonio de la Rosa (the "Three José Antonios Gang") would follow my footsteps to prison for the torture and murder of Juan José Sánchez Borrego, a twenty year old delinquent from Seville, known as *el Niño Kiko*? Who would have suspected that these three brave policemen without a blemish on their record, enrolled in the service of law and order, would drive this youth to an empty field, after torturing him in the dungeons of the police station, and there would shoot him dead, leaving his lifeless body in a swamp? Average people, always so ignorant, always so cowardly and so blind on purpose, ignored events like this when they came to light. They thought deeds like this only happened in dictatorships or in the old days, in cases like the Almeria case or in some Third World country, but they were wrong. Torture and murder

by the state continued to be the order of the day and cases like that of Santiago Corella, *el Nani*, demonstrated this. Spanish society wasn't very well informed about that one, but more cases could be added to the list, revealing the dirty war being waged by those in power. The Basques Lasa and Zabala, turned up in a cave, buried in quicklime, with obvious signs of being tortured savagely (for example having had their fingernails pulled out). Before that there was the case of Mikel Zabaltza, killed by drowning torture while in custody of the Guardia Civil, who continue their fascist activities. Groups of police like this were those who controlled the drug trade in the big cities or who used young delinquents to get rich, forcing them to work in exchange for not being sent to prison. The assassinations of the State and its hit men, the Security Forces, went much farther than anyone knew. They had many resources to hide their deeds. Even so, the public were aware of the activities of groups like GAL, led by Amedo and Domínguez (who would follow in the footsteps of Sancristobal, Rafael Vera, Planchuelo, Damborenea, Bourronuevo, and those that went missing after leaving the Socialist movement) including the murders of Lucia Irigoitia, Ángel Gurmindó, Domingo Perurena, and Eugenio Rodríguez Salazar. What other crimes went unknown? It was a mistake from a social point of view, to grant one group of people such power over the rest of the men and women; it could only generate injustice, abuses of power, and inequality. They became chiefs over ordinary people, who owed them respect and obedience. Many police misused their badge for their own ends or to put into practice their fascist ideas, an ideology most of them shared. They enriched themselves with the excuse of combating crime, some of them through blackmail and repression, others through theft and bribery. They maintained control over the citizenry, generating misery and flooding the country with drugs, with those in the most unruly sections of society, the youth, kept in a constant stupor and constantly feeding the system. What unknown crimes hadn't the police committed in the futile name of law and order!?

That afternoon I was taken to court. I felt depressed by the unfolding events but the worst of it all was the idea of going back to prison. I felt like I was in a dream that I could not wake up from but the pain and grief that crushed me told me it was real. I left the van with my hands cuffed behind my back, surrounded by police. The media vultures took pictures to show off to a morbid society, while a cordon of law enforcement agents restrained their insanity. They had only ever written ill about me, and this time it was the same. They treated me like a dangerous criminal, like a wild beast escaped from its cage, like a spectacle that they would make public and use as propaganda, when in fact I was no more than a sick man in chains who just wanted to die in freedom, perhaps in a faraway country where society was more humane.

They brought me in front of the judge and prosecutor. I sat on one of the seats in the office.

"Well, Tarrío," said the prosecutor, "nice mess they put together."

"Since when is wanting to be free news in this country? Things must be pretty bad..." I answered.

"Do you have anything to say for yourself?" interrupted the judge.

"No."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"You're very young. How did you end up in this mess?"

"Well you know how it goes, life..."

"It'll be worse for you now, didn't you realise that? Sign here," he said, handing me a paper.

They uncuffed me and I signed a piece of paper that declared me a prisoner. He then said to the escort:

"You can take him away."

"And see you don't escape again, Tarrío," joked the prosecutor.

"No. From now on I think I'll stay in the cell to make a point," I answered ironically, before leaving the office for the prison.

Seville Prison 2, 30 August 1991

About twenty guards escorted me into the complex of the modern superprison, recently opened by Antoni Asunción. I had hardly set foot inside when they grabbed me and brought me off to the psychiatric unit. They threw me onto a table and took my trousers off so they could X-ray me in the hope of finding hidden objects inside me. They found nothing. They removed the police handcuffs and put me in prison handcuffs, in which they transferred me to the isolation unit. There they took the cuffs off me and stripped me naked. They gave me a blue jumpsuit and some plastic sandals to wear.

“What happened to my clothes?” I asked.

“Forget your clothes, all you’re wearing from now on is a jumpsuit,” answered the Head Warden.

I pulled on the jumpsuit and put on the sandals. Then, all dressed up in my new prison uniform, they put me in one of the cells in the unit. It was totally empty except for a mattress that covered the metal frame of the bed. I stuck my head out the window.

“Is there anyone there?” I shouted.

After a while a voice answered.

“Who is it?”

“It’s José, from La Coruña,” I identified myself.

“Che?”

“Yes.”

“What’s up, you don’t recognise me or what? It’s Trancho, for fuck’s sake.”

The presence of my friend gave me great comfort. It was all I needed right then, when my spirits were at their lowest.

“They picked me up yesterday and now I’m here. What are you doing here?”

“I’m sitting here in a jumpsuit, no yard, no shop, no showers, nothing... These bastards have got us this time.”

“Why’s that?”

“They have applied a special regime: FIES. We’ve been here for a month already and it looks like we will be here for a long time.”

“Are you alone?”

“No. Victor is here, and your *paisano* Ayude, but he and Barrot are in another unit cuffed to their beds. Beni is here as well and some other guys I’m sure you don’t know. We’re all in the same boat.”

“Why did they put you in here?”

“After your hostage taking in Tenerife, Anxo and I tried to get out of Puerto 2 through the grounds but they grabbed us...”

“And what about Anxo?” I asked him.

“He’s in Villanubla, and you don’t want to know what it’s like in there. They’ve also opened FIES units in Badajoz, Jaén 2, and another in El Dueso, which I heard is the worst one they have.”

“That’s all we need,” I answered to this deluge of bad news. “There’s nothing in the cells?”

“Nothing. You’re just wearing a jumpsuit and sandals, right?”

“Yes.”

“So it’s the same in all the cells. We can’t shave or go to the showers, so imagine what state we’re in.”

“Fuck!”

At my exclamation Trancho answered with the tremendous laugh that characterised him.

“Things are really bad, Josiño,” he said.

The issue was clear. Using the excuse of the latest events that had happened in the prisons, Antoni Asunción—now appointed to the post of Secretary General at the Prison Management Authority—and his right hand man, Gerardo Mínguez Prieto—then deputy general of the Prison Inspection Service—had drawn up a new approach with de la Cuadra Salcedo, the Minister of Justice, which meant the introduction of a special regime for all those inmates considered very dangerous, those who had participated in riots, kidnappings, or escapes, or who had simply annoyed them. So they created a group

of maximum security prisons inside other high security prisons: bunkers in which they did not so much lock us up as bury us. To do this they were breaking all the relevant laws and imposing their own, which gave the State rights over *everything* concerning the targeted people. Through the Ministry of Justice they silenced all the judicial voices with the promise of promotions. To the media whores they issued a directive stating that they must omit any reporting of what had happened to these prisoners and to create an atmosphere against them—slandering us and making us out to be psychopaths—with the clear goal that people would accept these new units if they were gradually presented to society by well-respected professionals. They would do whatever was necessary, absolutely *anything*, to stop the protests of the prisoners, to destroy APRE(r) and restore order and discipline in the prisons through terrorism. I knew the methods, as they had used them in the past with COPEL. Repression would be exercised on the inmate to break his spirit through fear and to demoralise him, barraging his nervous system daily until he was, in effect, extinguished. It would be a difficult time for us, but none of us could imagine just how difficult...

El Dueso jail, Santander, September 1991

At six in the morning a large group of guards stormed into the cell and, after cuffing me behind my back, brought me to admissions.

There were several policemen waiting for me, who looked curiously at me wanting to know how someone could be capable of overpowering two of their companions. There was suspicion in their eyes, but I didn't see any hatred, which reassured me a little. They swapped the handcuffs and put them on in front, then put me inside a small van and we left in a direction unknown to me. On leaving the complex I tried to find out.

"Hey officer," I asked, "where are we going?"

"To Dueso," responded the sergeant, and then added after a while, "you really messed things up for your friends, huh?"

“That’s how things go...”

“At least you didn’t hurt them, which is the most important thing,” said the driver.

I ignored this comment. The news that El Dueso was the final destination awaiting me made me nervous. They couldn’t have given me worse news at that moment. It seemed as though all the misfortune in the world had been conjured up against me. I remembered the words of the inspectors from the Director General’s office in Tenerife after the kidnapping, and knew that they had kept their promise. El Dueso was a nest of experienced torturers, where the worst guards from the Franco era were sent. I was afraid, and with good reason, for my physical integrity. Along with Ocoña 1, Puerto de Santa María, and Herrera de la Mancha, El Dueso was one of the very worst prisons in the country. It was clear they weren’t taking me on a vacation.

It was more than a thousand kilometre journey, so I entertained myself by taking in the landscapes of different regions—though their beauty was marred by the grate welded onto the small windows. Was it my destiny to contemplate life through these bars? What kind of magical waste is it that nature gives us eyes and that it costs so much to see—to recognize, to contemplate—what is in front of us? People should have a right to a second life. This life is unfair, tyrannical, and has no right of appeal; seeing it in this way, why do we still appreciate it so much when death appears to be the answer?

It is as complicated to try to understand why things are as they are as it is easy to ignore them. Lost in absurdity, submerged in the most absolute madness, we participate in the destruction of man by his fellow man. When justice decides to make life miserable for someone, it does it forever. A tantrum thrown by a powerful person can change the course of a family’s life, sending them into disgrace and misery; a stupid sentence can make a man undergo untold suffering. Society never seems to become embarrassed by this process, but (through its democratic procedures) gives its approval and consent.

To make me, and many men and women besides, disappear into the sewers of prison, would not only not solve any problem, it would only create them.

The truck made some stops. The guards found a way to interact with me and bought me a sandwich and a bottle of water. We ate and drank and then continued the journey. I spent the whole trip in silence, looking through bars at the countryside and the mountains, looking at freedom. It was evening when we reached the province of Santander. Then something happened that I will never forget. As we were stopped at a traffic light, a cattle truck pulled up beside us and just in front of the window I was looking out of, a calf stared out at me with its big brown eyes while sucking on the bars of its cage, maybe confusing them with its distant mother's udders. We stared at each other, curiously, and I felt that we had something in common. We were both being transported to the slaughterhouse—only in his case it would be quicker. We were both victims of the plans of men who had set themselves up as *masters*, him of his, and I of those who claimed to be mine.

We arrived at El Dueso late at night. It was an enormous prison, the biggest in the country in terms of square meters. After passing the first security checkpoint at the front of the compound we followed a small road to the recently-opened FIES unit. It was situated apart from the rest of the prison, as it was necessary to show that there was a different, distinct jail. The gloomy appearance of the prison made a stark impression on me. They took me from the van and brought me into the unit, among a group of visibly nervous guards. I was taken straight to the lower floor of the building where the showers were, still in handcuffs. They locked me in the shower room and then took the handcuffs off through the bars of the shower door, which had been locked from the outside with a key. From the other side a guard ordered:

“Strip.”

I took off the jumpsuit I was wearing, along with the plastic sandals. It was all I had brought with me.

“If you want to shower you can...”

“I don’t have a towel.”

“We’ll get you one that you can keep.”

I turned on a tap and waited until the water got hot. Then I stepped under the stream of water and, making use of a small bar of soap I found, I washed myself, taking my time, as the guards watched me. When I had finished I left the shower and dried myself on a small white towel they had brought me, along with a new blue jumpsuit and some new plastic sandals. This new dress code was a means of stopping us from moving a metre without being noticed. US model, of course. I put on my new prison uniform and stepped into the sandals.

“Turn around.”

I turned around, putting my back to the barred door of the shower, and they handcuffed me with my hands behind my back. After doing this, they opened the door and in a large group the guards escorted me to a new place of confinement, a mini-unit on the top floor, where the cells were situated. It was a cold tiled corridor, separated by a gate of long thick bars and inside, lined up like cubbyholes, were these numbered cells/tombs. I was given number eleven. Once inside, they closed the gate after me, took off my handcuffs through the bars and closed the door, leaving me alone. It was a small cell, with a metal bed on top of which was a mattress, two blankets, and a bedsheet set. There was a sink, a wooden table with no seat and a toilet sunk into the ground. It was lit up by a bulb that shone in from the other side of the gate, over the steel door. In the top part of this there was a peephole, constantly open, and protected by a thick piece of reinforced glass. I went over to the window and opened it. There was total silence and an eerie loneliness. There was a big yard beside the unit, which appeared to be totally surrounded by a high stone wall. At least the bars were

normal, although they had been crossed with another set of steel bars, but they could be cut and I intended to try it. It was a hope. This was what I was thinking when a voice called to me through the windows.

“Who’s there?”

“Who’s that?” I asked.

“Juanjo, *el Garfia*.”

Knowing I had a friend there lifted my spirits:

“It’s José.”

“When did you get here?”

“Just now, from Seville 2.”

We had a huge amount to talk about so the questions and answers followed quickly”

“And why were you there?”

“They got me at the bus station...”

“Oh, you escaped? We didn’t hear anything in here.”

“Who’s here with you” I asked him.

“Pedro Vázquez, a Basque guy. Good man...”

“But anyway, Juan and I escaped from the boat that goes from Cádiz to Tenerife. You know the deal...”

“And what happened to Juan?”

“He’s still free, at least I haven’t heard he’d been captured, and when I was in the police station they were still looking for him.”

“Fucking hell! That’s amazing! And how are you?”

“Alright, but a bit confused with all this.”

“Well you’ve seen nothing yet, José. We’ve been here a couple of weeks and it’s still like the first day. We don’t go onto the yard and they’ve stopped us from communicating with anybody, even with our lawyers and families. We are totally incommunicado and we don’t know what’s going on outside, since we have no papers or radio. Nothing.” After a brief pause he continued. “They only give us a towel, a toothbrush cut in half, soap, toilet paper and what we’re wearing. The blankets and mattress are taken back in the morning

after roll call, at about eight, and they don't give them back to us until ten at night."

"You're joking, man," I said, gobsmacked.

"You'll see," he assured me, laughing. "What a mess they've thrown us into."

"And you?" I asked, interested.

"The GEOS attacked me in my sleep. I barely had time to get laid a few times and rob some banks."

"At least you got your dick wet. I didn't even get to do that..."

We both started to laugh. I joked,

"So, public enemy number one, huh?"

"More bullshit from the press, José."

I was tired from the trip so after talking with my friend I turned in for the night. Through old prisoner code, Juanjo had let me know that there was a possibility of trying something, so I had to suppose there was a saw in the unit. I brightened up. This hope filled my mind until dreams took over.

The following morning, while I was still dead asleep, a group of guards came to my cell. I got up and put on the jumpsuit:

"What's going on?"

"We have to handcuff you. Turn around."

I went to the gate and let them cuff me. They then opened the gate and put me in a different cell. They removed the mattress, blankets and sheets, and put me back in again. After they had finished with me they did the same thing to Juanjo and Pedro and then left. I was still tired, so I put the towel on the bed and lay down, curled up and cold. A little while later they brought breakfast.

"Go to the back of the cell," ordered the guard. They opened a small steel door in the gate, fitted with a latch, through which they passed the food: some bread and watered-down milk.

"From now on, whenever this hatch is open, you'll go to the back of the cell and keep your hands visible. Then you come get your breakfast or whatever it is, all right?"

I didn't answer but it seemed he was serious. I ate hungrily and then went to the windows to talk with my companions.

"Good morning, Juanjo," I shouted.

"Good morning."

"You weren't lying about the guys here, were you?"

"I told you yesterday. For now the best thing to do is to wait and see what happens since they're pretty pissed off right now. I don't think it will last that long."

That morning was my first contact with the seagulls. There were dozens of them. They were small and white with black eyes and orange beaks. They came from the seashore near the prison and perched on the wall or on the yard looking for food. We threw them little balls of bread crumbs that they fought the sparrows for. I was watching the birds when the door of the cell opened. There were several guards, accompanied by some people dressed in civilian clothes.

"We have to do some tests, Tarrío," said one of them.

"What sort of tests?"

"Some X-rays."

"I had some done in Seville two days ago."

"It doesn't matter, you have to have some more done."

"No."

One of the civilians spoke up. He introduced himself as a medical director. I read the name Enrique Acín on his badge.

"If you don't agree, we will force you to do them."

"Do whatever you want."

They closed the door and tried the same thing with my companions. They got the same negative response. They went looking for reinforcements to make us have the X-rays. We were defenceless and at their mercy. We went to the windows and talked:

"What did they say to you, Juanjo?"

"The same thing they said to you."

"What do we do?" asked Pedro.

We debated this question before they came back to the wing. We couldn't do anything but obey the badges since we couldn't avoid them in any way. There was no escape. They would give us a beating and do the X-rays anyway. The three of us agreed to do them. These extra couple of minutes came at the right time, as Juanjo and Pedro hid the saws in a secure place. When the guards appeared with sticks and chains, we put up no resistance, and one by one, they took us from the cells. We were taken to an X-ray machine that they had brought to the unit, made to take off our clothes and stand in different positions while the guards held us down. After this humiliation they took us back to the cells. The medical reports would say that we had agreed to the X-rays or they would not mention it at all.

Much of what happens in prison is no more than slavery camouflaged under theoretically progressive rules and techniques to create an illusion so the treatment can continue all the same. Being polite to a prisoner, for example, though nothing else changes. It was all the same to mistreat a prisoner while you call him *sir*. It was hypocritical to be polite to someone and then make them bend over with their ass in the air or make them shit in a bucket after a visit, which is what regularly happened to second-grade prisoners. It was repugnant for these people to call themselves doctors and not only allow but cover up these X-ray practices, which could easily cause cancer in one of us after so many sessions. A similar thing happened with the name of the institution. It had been changed from *prison* to *penitentiary centre*; *jailer* changed to *officer*; *torture* to *unnecessary severity* (ha, ha, ha!); *repression* to *treatment*. With all this and some gardens surrounding the *prisons*, the administration tried to show a more humane image to society, a false, hypocritical, and cynical image, which masked the crude reality. What had happened to us was just the beginning of this reality taken to its highest end.

That afternoon I called the guard to get me some paper and a pen so I could write a letter to a friend in Bilbao and ask her to

come see me. He gave me one sheet and a pen refill:

“Put the name of the person receiving it and yours at the bottom, and we will send it to Madrid to see if it’s okay. When you finish give me back the pen and paper, all right?”

I wrote the letter to my friend. Her name was Ana and I had known her in La Coruña years before. She had been my girlfriend and I hoped the authorities would allow her to visit me. I sent her the telephone number of my relatives in Galicia so she could call them and keep them informed of where I was. I said nothing of the prison conditions in the letter so the card would get out. If they had discarded all their regulations and totally destroyed our privacy it was necessary to be discreet. I hoped she would come. At dinnertime, I gave back the sheet and the pen. I got my food and ate it standing at the window while I talked with my companions.

“This is unbelievable! We’ll have to do something about that,” I said.

“They have us by the balls, José,” said Juanjo. “It’s better to wait a few days and see what they do, and meanwhile keep ourselves busy. You know the deal..”

There were still some seagulls circling freely overhead and we tried to give them the chicken scraps we had been given to eat. It amused me that they had decided not to give us chicken bones in case we tried to make knives out of them. Those bastards had seen one too many James Bond movies. I was equally amazed by the voracity of the seagulls and the fights they had over pieces of chicken. Some pecked each other without restraint. Others, more astute, waited on a wall until the rest were beaten and then went after the one who had flown away with the prize in its beak and attacked him from behind. Then the first one, surprised and angered, went after him uselessly. Time would prove that those that decided to rob the rest did so because of their inability to fight. So that they could survive they exploited a quality they had as an advantage over the rest – speed and cunning. Seagulls are one of the species

best adapted to man and his cities and pollution, which guarantees their survival. They are so intelligent that, like rats, they have turned garbage into their main food so that they will never go hungry.

At eight the guards came for an inspection. As my friend Juanjo had warned me, this happened every day after dinner. I was forced to strip naked and they examined the overalls. Then they cuffed me and took me to an adjacent cell so they could search the one I had been in, hitting the bars with a steel pipe to see if they had been sawn. After all the formalities they put me back in the cell. After this, about ten, they cuffed me again and brought in the mattress along with the sheets and blankets. All this was crazy enough to upset even the calmest mind if it was prolonged long enough. We hoped it wouldn't be.

We succeeded, through the Head Warden, in getting books from the library, at least. The Head Warden agreed to this on the condition that we wouldn't pass them around or request the same ones. They didn't want us to be able to pass messages through them. Reading was important to us; along with exercise and lengthy conversations, it was an important way of combating loneliness and alienation. They allowed us to shower but made us wear handcuffs behind our backs with an escort of four guards while only wearing a towel around our waist. We had to go through this if we wanted to shower and afterwards we were made to strip in front of the guards: not a second of privacy. It was disgusting to feel the looks of these pigs on your body, a dirty indecent gaze. Yes, it was humiliating.

Pedro, Juanjo, and I tried to keep ourselves occupied as best we could in spite of all this. We read a lot and did constant exercises, performing them together. Garfia and I made some miniature chess boards with some pages out of a book, with the help of a pen borrowed from a guard on the pretext of writing a letter. We played long games in a low voice to avoid being discovered and having the boards confiscated. We had to be very careful so they wouldn't discover the boards during the searches, since it was all we

had and we had to safeguard it. It was in such conditions that the first week in El Dueso went by. This was a prison inside a prison. They would not let us onto the yard or make a telephone call. Our lawyers were not allowed to visit us and were told we weren't here, or that we had been transferred to another prison. Guards continued to take the mattresses away in the morning and return them at night, and to carry out searches daily after dinner when we were always stripped. Our clothes were still the same, a blue jumpsuit and plastic sandals. Nonetheless we took it all in good humour. We looked like builders. The jumpsuit they gave me was too small so the legs barely covered my ankles and the sleeves came to my elbows. Juanjo was the opposite, he told us. They had given him a suit too big so he was walking around with the legs and sleeves rolled up. It seemed Pedro had gotten the right size. It was funny. The doctor made a daily consultation without showing any emotion and had no problem offering us all sorts of drugs. They said they could do nothing but prescribe tranquillizers if we needed them. We refused to receive any help from these mercenaries.

It wasn't long before things started to get complicated, as we had anticipated. In my second week, Pedro Vázquez lost his cool and refused to hand over the tray to the guard after eating, which we were obliged to do after lunch and dinner since we were not allowed to have any objects in the cell more solid than cloth, paper, or soap (which they soon changed to liquid soap). From the cell I was in I heard the conversation.

"Hand over the tray," shouted a guard from the corridor.

"No, come get it if you want it..."

"If we have to come in there we'll make things worse for you."

"Worse than what you're already doing to us? It couldn't be any worse. We spent a month in here locked up like dogs, no yard, no visits... and I've had it up to here with all this and all of you."

They closed the door and left. They soon came back in force with truncheons and helmets. They opened the door of the cell

our companion was in and then the gate and went in, hitting Pedro. Once they had subdued him, they chained him to the cage with his hands behind his back. I was surprised and angry and couldn't contain my rage and started hitting the door when the guards passed in front of me.

"What do you want?" asked one of the porcine faces in the grille.

"Open the door," I asked. He opened the door and leaned in:

"What's the matter?"

I grabbed him by the neck through the bars of the gate. Surprised by my reaction, he backed away while trying to hit my hand.

"You're a gang of cowards," I shouted at them, "you don't have any reason to be beating him..."

"Bring the keys," he told his colleagues.

I rushed to the wooden window shutter and pulled it from its hinges, approaching the gate with it.

"Let's see if you're the first one in, you coward." I said to the guard I had been talking to. He was thin and looked like a traitor. He had been nicknamed *El Calavera* [The Skull]. He was an oppressor. He liked the sense of power this dirty job gave him. You could see it in his eyes, in his expressions. Frightened by my actions they went away looking for reinforcements and shields. About a dozen of them came back and opened the door. They came in in formation, protected from my blows by their plastic shields. *El Calavera* was the last one to come in. Pushing me back with the shields they cornered me against the wall and took the shutter from my hands, raining blows down on me with their batons. I fell to the ground, covering myself, trying instinctively to protect my head with my hands, but I couldn't. Several kicks landed in my ribs, drawing shouts of pain out of me. After that they dragged me to the gate and chained me to it. Once handcuffed behind my back and immobilized *El Calavera* said to me:

"If it was just me who had come in it would have been the same end result," he boasted.

When they left my head was still throbbing. Despite the commotion I could hear them talking to Juanjo and preparing to go in and beat him too. He had barricaded himself in the cell in solidarity with us. I shouted to him.

“Juanjo, Juanjo...”

“What?” he answered through the windows of the cell.

“Let it go, you’re not going to succeed in doing anything, they’ll just beat you. I’m all right. Let it go...”

“Are you sure you’re ok?”

“Yes.”

After this he offered no resistance, but just for his show of solidarity they chained him in the same way as us, although they didn’t beat him. For his part, Pedro, while sitting up, managed to break the sink with a kick while insulting the guards, but they went away and left us there handcuffed. A heavy silence fell over the wing. Injustice and abuse had been carried out once again with impunity. They had done it simply as a show of administrative force, a pure exhibition of their methods. Juanjo called me. We shouted to each other:

“Hey José.”

“Talk to me.”

“How are you doing?”

“A bit battered, I think there’s a gash in my head.”

“Sons of bitches.”

“And how are you?” I asked.

“Chained up crab style.”

“And Pedro?”

“I’m all right,” he shouted to us from the other side of the wing. The echo of the corridor carried his voice clearly. “They gave me a couple of slaps and now I’m handcuffed.”

“What did you break?” I asked him.

“The wash basin. I couldn’t do much else being handcuffed like this...”

Incomprehensibly we started to laugh. We continued chatting

and insulting the guards for a long time. Then silence fell again, a deathly silence. The position was uncomfortable. We had been handcuffed so securely that we could neither sit down nor stand up properly, which, as the hours passed, became a physical torture that was incredibly painful. We maintained the hope that they would let us out of the chains for the night but we were mistaken. Around ten they came to the wing with some blankets and door by door threw one inside. When they came to me I rejected it, throwing it off with my legs. One of them tried to provoke me.

“If I had come in here this afternoon you would have learned your lesson.”

I made the mistake of falling into his trap.

“Take off these cuffs and show me,” I said to him.

“Even now you’re lippy?” he shouted, kicking me in the head.

My forehead smashed against the tiles of the toilet wall, one of which broke, cutting my right eyebrow. I felt the blood run down my nose and two more kicks to my face. I managed to hear my friend Juanjo insult them while one of them closed the cuffs, tightening the steel further on my wrists. It took me a minute to recover from the shock. Meanwhile the guards closed the gate and the door and left.

“What happened, José?” asked Juanjo.

“Nothing, one of the bastards kicked me a few times...”

“Fucking cowards!...”

I felt an immense rage. I moved my head towards the window and I looked at the black sky full of stars in order to avoid this terrible place. Blood continued to drip down my face and half blinded one of my eyes. In moments like this, if any of us had a gun we could commit murder without thinking about it. This was how they ignored the law, justifying their crime and bringing us to the same possibility. If we crossed over the barrier of fear of death, some of us went towards mass destruction, others towards self destruction. Strongly gripped by contempt and hatred, we suffered from powerlessness, injustice, and abuse more cowardly than any

man could conceive of. Chained up all day, stripped every night, taken on a whim to X-ray machines, our hearts were filled with so much evil there was only room for hatred and revenge. How could I ignore this blue jumpsuit or this freezing cold or the idea that AIDS coursed through my veins? How could I not feel hatred when hearing my companion beaten, the cry of his injured spirit, the death blow to his pride, the burying of the word pity between men, these bars, these chains, these porcine looks, these dungeons, this infernal underworld which seemed to never end? The silent hatred, and the sadistic killings in restless dreams when the mind wandered in anger, and the tyrannical heart was born in the most profound pain of the soul? How could I ignore these scrutinising violations of privacy—defiled through the glass peephole—or the continued belittlement by the ghostly jailer—searching for a weakness in his captives with the aim of driving them to suicide, madness, or desperation? How could a man survive all this and hold onto his sanity?

They didn't *have* dangerous men there: they *created* dangerous men there, which is very different. The severity of these barbaric methods left no doubt about the State, its authority, and its mode of operating. But who was interested in what happened in prison? No one, it seemed. Society was not worried about what happened to a gang of vandals associated with APRE(r). It was enough that the guards did the real dirty work. After all, we were the ones who, when free, ganged up to live at the expense of others. No doubt they held us, the "bad guys", in contempt. They had the right to revenge, no doubt. But I didn't recognise their right to call themselves honourable citizens, nor the right to be free according to their own laws when they committed the innate injustice of collaborating in crimes as defined by *their* penal code, participating with *their* money, approving with *their* silence, confirming with *their* votes. Those who directed scorn towards us did no more than scorn themselves by their total cowardice.

Where was the morality of the free people? Where was equality

in justice? It was trapped in here, seized by cowardice and turned into cynicism, self-interest, and egotism. They enjoyed their place in the flock and called their pastor “State” and their conscience “Majority.” Nothing could be lower than the behaviour of a bad, cowardly guard, except perhaps a cowardly people capable of paying for this behavior.

The night was long and the pain in my immobilised arms was unbearable. I tried several different positions but they did nothing but make the pain worse. I felt the cold dampness creep over my body, especially into my bare feet. I stretched out as best I could and with my legs extended I reached the blanket that hours before I had thrown off. I brought it towards me and wrapped my feet up in it. I tried to sleep but it was impossible so I tried thinking of something to keep my mind off the pain, off the suffering. I remembered the past, and letting my imagination wander, I remembered old friends. It was a long time since the reformatory when we were more united in freedom and adventure than ever. I smiled as I remembered my friend Chico when we had gone to rob a textile factory. We got such a surprise when we discovered that the items in question were ladies’ underwear, from fine lace panties to bras in alarming dimensions. I laughed when I remembered ransacking one of the offices of the factory and Chico appeared wearing a bra wrapped around his chest and some white knickers held up with his thumbs on his hips. He blew me a couple of kisses from the doorway of the office and said to me, “how do I look?” We both laughed wildly. Or that other time when we escaped from the reformatory in Palavea, after locking up the teachers. We came back the same night with a stolen car, a 12-gauge shotgun and some friends. While the driver did laps around the school we took turns shooting out the windows of the institution in charge of our repression. No doubt they were the best memories I had of my youth. Marvellous times.

Lost in these thoughts, the light of day surprised me. I came back to reality, enduring the cold as best I could, along with the pain

in my chained arms. It would still be a few hours until a group of guards opened the door of the cell:

“Tarrío, we’re going to release you. If you try something or break anything else we’ll cuff you again.”

I felt totally broken, so I answered in a calming voice: “You won’t have any problems from me...”

They freed me. It took several minutes to regain feeling in my arms. While they freed my companions I walked around the cell. I tried to get them to leave me the blanket, but they took it from me. I needed to move, walk, to rid myself of the cold that gripped my bones. I talked to Juanjo and Pedro while walking by shouting through the windows:

“How are you guys doing?”

“Almost dead from the cold,” answered Pedro.

I imagined him walking the cell like I was.

“Piece of shit jail,” shouted Juanjo, “let’s hope they at least give us something warm for breakfast, or any breakfast at all.”

“We’ll see...” I answered.

In a rare humanitarian gesture they gave us a good breakfast and offered us the chance to take a hot shower, even if we were handcuffed and naked except for a towel. We ate hungrily and afterwards we went to the showers one by one to soak ourselves. I had a face full of dried blood and the jumpsuit was stained, so it felt good. In the shower I washed and, surprise surprise, they gave me a shiny new jumpsuit in the right size, along with some white polyester shorts and a white short-sleeve shirt. Once I had dressed they took me to one of the other cells at the end of the unit. I was visited by two doctors. I had a gash in my right eyebrow that they fixed up with small pieces of sticky plaster. I talked to the doctor while he worked on me.

“I’m cold. Can’t you talk to them about giving us some blankets?”

“That’s not my decision.”

“I’m HIV positive and I don’t know how my immune system is

doing right now, but if I come down with pneumonia it could kill me," I insisted.

"We'll do some tests. I can't do anything else."

They closed the door. If it wasn't for the bars I would have strangled him there and then. I felt the wound through the bandages and then lay down on the metal frame. I remembered a phrase Freud had adopted: *Homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man). He was right, very right.

Someone was calling me. It was Juanjo:

"José, come to the window!"

"What?" I answered, already at the window.

"Are your feet cold?"

"Fuck, of course they are!"

"Well, don't throw away the plastic bread bags, you can use them as socks, but cover your feet in toilet paper first."

It was a good idea and we told Pedro. The three of us put it into practise. When I saw these revolutionary socks I couldn't help from laughing loudly. I went to the window:

"You should see what I look like."

Juanjo laughed.

"Hey, they're not bad," joked Pedro with his peculiar sense of humour.

"They took your chess game, right?" asked Juanjo.

"Yes."

"We'll have to make another one this afternoon when the other shift comes on."

"Are you not tired of losing?"

"Hey, listen, I let you win to keep your spirits up."

We quickly learned the necessity of maintaining a sense of humour amongst us. It helped us. Here, more than ever, we only had each other and it was a very strong bond. We made new chess games, they confiscated them and prohibited them, and we made them again. We read a lot and since we were forbidden to read the

same books from the library, we recounted the stories from each book we read. We discussed Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his theory on friendship. Juanjo explained it to me. He classified it into three different types. One type of friendship was in youth (the truest one according to the book); friendship out of interest was the second type (the most common); the third type of friendship was that of virtue (the most durable). We spent hours debating these issues. Pedro didn't read much so he contributed little to these conversations. Sharing our opinions on *The Metamorphosis*, *The Odyssey*, *Hamlet*, or the military incursions of the Greeks in the autobiography of Xenophon, occupied a lot of the time that was supposed to be dedicated to destroying our minds and wills. To avoid falling into physical apathy we challenged ourselves to do certain amounts of exercises. Juanjo concentrated a lot on the physical aspect of our well-being and constantly kept me moving, encouraging me to build my muscles. There were afternoons when we would do five hundred squats in groups of twenty to fifty. The management, for its part, started to reinforce security. They welded new bars on the gate that protected the door in such a way that, to succeed in opening a hole big enough for a man, at least six bars would have to be cut, which would be impossible without them noticing. They also placed a second reinforced lock on the gate, which had a different key. In this way, in case we grabbed one of the guards from the wing he, could only open one of the cells, since they only ever opened the cells one at a time. This considerably reduced the possibility of a successful kidnapping. To guarantee their security, they buried us alive. They came to give us X-rays by force. This time they brought us in handcuffs to the prison infirmary, about two hundred metres from the FIES unit, where they shackled us to a table while the guards and doctors hid in a cabin that protected them from the exposure. Then they dressed us and we went back to the unit, changing cells. Through all this they still took us out one by one and escorted us with a dozen guards, except inside the unit, when there were only four guards. We were better protected than the central vault

of the Bank of Banesto. There was also a Guardia Civil on guard during the day armed with a Cetme sub-machinegun, permanently stationed in one of the sentry boxes outside the unit.

October came. We were still not allowed outside. Pedro managed to have a visit with a lawyer, but he had been cut off the minute he started talking about the conditions they had us in. Any conversation with the lawyers outside or by letter that discussed the FIES regime was immediately censored. This was carried out with the consent of the JVP and the regional courts. Protests had no effect and didn't bother the Administration. At the start of the month they transferred Ernesto Pénez Barrot from Seville 2. We talked and he told us that things had been happening in Seville and that the JVP had been getting involved in the FIES affair. We heard also, with great regret, of the arrest of Juan Redondo in Seville at the hands of the police when, surprised during the night by a city motorbike cop, he had tried to grab his gun. We also heard that they had opened an investigation into what was going on and we felt hopeful. The officer of the JVP in Seville, shocked by the conditions he had found the FIES prisoners in—thin jumpsuits, without showers, handcuffed with month-long beards, all visibly mistreated—started a case titled Judicial Instruction No. 9 of Seville, which opened the investigation known as no. 4.024/91 against Antoni Asunción Hernández, Gerardo Mínguez Prieto, Antonio de Diego Martín, and Isidro Colón Durán for crimes of torture, unnecessary use of force, and obstruction and falsification of official documents. The judge Elena Sánchez Sevilla had taught everyone a lesson, as the only judge in all of Spain willing to condemn what the government had done with FIES prisoners, while other Judges of Penal Vigilance, José Luis Castro in Valladolid, Martínez de la Concha in Badajoz, and the one from Santander, silenced the situation in their respective provinces and prisons. A regime like this could only be maintained with the clear approval of the judges. With a little more dignity, the district attorney in Seville raised a stink when first, the accused

Antoni Asunción and his companions remained free on bail paid for with state funds (from a fund that would later become infamous) of twenty million pesetas and then, the attorney-general (Eligio Hernández) ordered the charges dropped against the defendants associated with PSOE. These defendants were not independent and they were obligated to obey. Nonetheless, the attorney in charge, Luis Fernández Arévalo, was harsh in his conclusions against the director of Penal Administration, which was reflected in the report of Instruction No. 9 of Seville, dated 8th of January 1992.

Several days after the arrival of Barrot in El Dueso, Juan Redondo arrived. He told us they had ruled FIES illegal in Seville 2 and that to avoid complying with the judicial decision they had dispersed everyone who had been imprisoned there. Juan had been taken to El Dueso to keep us company; the rest went to Villanubla or Badajoz.

“What’s happening Juan?” I greeted him.

“Here I am, prisoner again. And how are you?”

“I’m well, did they take X-rays of you?”

“Yes, they took me to the infirmary and strapped me to a table with two pairs of restraints.”

“They force us to have them too. Every fortnight or so, more or less, so it seems.”

Through codes we told Juan that at least we had two saws in the unit and that according to Pedro, who knew the prison well, we could try something. He warmed to the idea immediately.

They made us change cells again and took me to the first one, that is, the one beside the sentry. Juan and Pedro took the last two, so they began to cut on the bars of the windows. They put their hands to work, while Juanjo and I sang love songs, making a racket with the intent of hiding the squeaking saws cutting into the bars so they wouldn’t be heard. I kept watch for when the gate to the wing opened to let the Guardia in, so my companions would know and stop cutting. When this happened I called to Juan through the window:

“Hey Juan! Look at that seagull...” and then they knew I was warning them of the presence of the guard on the wing, and he in turn warned Pedro.

“Pedro, check out that funny seagull!”

Along with me, Juanjo also spent a lot of time doing this, since I have always been a little hard of hearing. We had our security system, and if it failed we still had a companion as backup. Some time later, the guards and some assistants went down to work on the yard below our windows, and some guards took the opportunity to provoke us psychologically by shouting things like “You’ll never get out of here except in a pine box,” and from the windows, we were restricted to looking at them with contempt, but among ourselves, without even looking at them, we let out big peals of laughter and hurled abuse at them in honour of their imbecility and the gratuitous cruelty that they were happy to carry out.

“Laugh,” they said, visibly disturbed, “but soon you’ll be begging to get out of here. We’ll see if you’re still laughing in a month...”

The routine remained the same—life stayed the same. We carried on without any news from the outside and still sporting the blue jumpsuits and the plastic sandals. One afternoon, Barrot lost control and started to break the windows in his cell. He couldn’t go any longer without smoking, trying to endure this constant pressure of emptiness and loneliness that the cells exerted on us, totally empty, robbed of any vestige of humanity. To this was added the extreme cold, the restraints, the daily searches, and total isolation from the outside world. A large group of guards went into Barrot’s cell and, after hitting him a few times, left him handcuffed to the gate. The matter didn’t escalate further and a few hours later they let him out of the handcuffs. We tried to calm him down and explain that some of us were cutting the bars, and that this wasn’t the best way to help since it put the guards on high alert. A few days later, a group of assistants and carpenters from the prison came to put some frames

onto the windows attached with screws into the concrete. They were doing it cell by cell while they swapped us out one by one. Once they had attached the frames, they put hard transparent plastic sheets inside them with holes drilled in them, supposedly to allow air to circulate. I say supposedly because they were blatantly burying us alive. With these screens installed, the windows stayed shut and we couldn't open them, and it impeded our access to the bars, but, above all else, we couldn't communicate among ourselves. They needed to isolate and divide us, impede what human warmth we managed to make among ourselves: the long conversations, always encouraging, that sustained us came through the windows and gave us a feeling of strength in spite of the repression we faced. Their methodical strategy decreed that every minute we were in El Dueso we would be fully conscious of our isolation, of our pain, so that we would yield, breaking us psychologically to get inside us and destroy our spirits.

Once they had finished attaching the plastic screens to the windows, all my companions went back to their dungeons except for me. They left me in the same one, since they hadn't finished working on the cell I was destined for. We were barely able to hear each other, as we had to shout to communicate. We agreed to break the windows. Immediately after the agreement loud blows started to sound out in the hallway. I got very excited, as I imagined the rest of my companions were. It didn't take long to break the screens, and big pieces of plastic fell down into the yard. By the time the guards got to the wing there wasn't a single window left to break. They came back armed to the teeth with shields, helmets, and batons, and with lumps in their throats, since they were truly scared by this unexpected reaction, so sudden and openly subversive. They believed there should be no other reaction but submission to the pressure and repression to which we were subjected. Cell by cell, they handcuffed my companions to the gates, but they didn't beat them. When they left, I talked with my companions.

"What happened Juan?" I asked.

“They cuffed me to the gate but it’s fine, the plastic is all broken...”

“The same thing here,” interjected Pedro, “seeing as I threw the sink through it!”

“Did they cuff you?” Juan asked Pedro.

“Yes.”

“And you, Juanjo?”

“Me too, but their plastic screen got broken so at least they have to go buy a new one,” he joked.

Barrot had been transferred out a few days previously for a trial in Ocaña, so he missed the party. A few hours after the incident, and upset by the conditions my companions were cuffed in, I decided to break up the cell. I pulled the window out of its frame and destroyed the washbasin, and then I started to hit the gate with it, making a racket to attract the attention of the guards. They arrived in a pack along with the Head Warden. They opened the door.

“What’s going on now, Tarrío?” asked the Head Warden.

“I want you to let my companions out of their chains,” I asked him.

“So they can go do the same thing again, right?”

“No. They broke the windows because it’s too much, and you know that. Other than that we don’t want any problems...”

“First put down the window and let us handcuff you while we talk. I give you my word that we’ll let the others go before dinner, all right?”

Without opening the gate they cuffed me to the bars and closed the door. Juan called to me:

“What did they say to you?”

“That they’ll let us go before dinner.”

“All of us?” asked Juanjo.

“That’s what he said, who knows.”

The warden kept his word. Before dinner they were released and changed to different cells. Then it was my turn. They gave us dinner and we talked excitedly by the windows while throwing pieces of

meat to the seagulls who, with loud squawks, fought voraciously over them.

“Fuck, they look like vultures in disguise,” I said to Juan, admiring the gluttony of the birds.

“Come on!” He laughed at this, “but they are lovable beings...”

The next morning the carpenters came back to take the screens off the windows. This got us excited. However, the cell changes meant that Juan and Pedro had to start cutting the bars again. We decided to wait a few days to allow the guards’ nerves to calm down and everything to relax before starting again.

Around this time I received a letter that had been delayed for two months. It was from Ana, and she had also sent me some photos. Giving it to me, the guard said:

“Read it, and when you’re finished I’ll come get it, since you’re not allowed keep letters in your cell.”

I said nothing to this brute and set about reading my friend’s letter. She wanted to come see me, but needed to get permission from the JPV. I looked at her photos. She was sitting on green grass in a garden and looked as beautiful as ever. I loved her, without a doubt, and I hoped to see her soon. Once I had finished reading the letter, I began to respond immediately, and then I wrote to the judge asking him to allow her to visit me. I fell onto the metal bench that they called a bed, and with the towel rolled up as a pillow, I looked at her photos again while memories filled my head, rocking myself to sleep with sentimentality.

At lunchtime, the guard who had given me the letter asked for it back, and I of course refused to give it to him. The guard got angry with me and threatened me:

“If you don’t give it back we’ll come in for it.”

So, after getting the food tray and putting it on the bed, I tore up the photos and the letter in front of him and threw the pieces down the toilet. Then I flushed and despite the pain I felt seeing the sewer swallowing up the pieces of my life, I answered the guard with

a big smile.

“All yours.”

“I’m reporting you,” he said, slamming the door shut.

I took the tray and started to eat, standing up at the window looking out at the yard and at the seagulls that were gathering under Juan’s window, since he fed them the most. The gulls liked him. It seemed they could differentiate him from the rest and we teased him about it: “Hey Juan, the little seagulls are calling you!” He called them *beings*, which made them seem more human than real humans. Neither Juan nor the rest of us could imagine a group of seagulls jailing one of them and torturing him day after day, or not allowing him a blanket, a mattress, or even a letter from a loved one.

Barrot came back from his trial and confirmed that in Badajoz, Valladolid, and Jaén there were new regimes like the one we were undergoing in El Dueso, in which the majority of escapist and rebellious prisoners from all of Spain (all known to us) were being held. However, the regime we were in was somewhat different, not only in the security measures but also in the psychological stress being applied. We were responsible for the last free actions to echo in the media, and so through society. That is why the Administration chose us for the application of an exemplary punishment, to show all the other prisoners: we had to get on our knees and crawl through hoops... or explode. We continued to be barred from the yard, without any visits, dressed in the blue jumpsuits and plastic sandals. All they gave us were some sheets and the inside of a ballpoint pen when we wanted to write. We had to leave out the envelopes and stamps, and write the letter on a blank page so they could examine it and mail it, so that with a bit of luck whoever it was destined for might receive it a couple of months later.

We had to spend the whole day in these empty dungeons, which was difficult to endure. We had no other entertainment than playing chess on a home-made board or reading a book, which was the

most helpful thing to do since the saying “a book is a window to the world” was never more true. We escaped through this window and so survived the isolation. We spent hours in silence—a brutal silence, desperate—which filled the wing, creating a sinister atmosphere that again reminded us what in reality was difficult to forget: we were buried alive in concrete tombs. It made us want to break everything and scream. Scream so that everyone knew, in spite of it all, that we were still alive and had our spirits intact to keep fighting.

In their insistence on robbing us of everything, they went cell by cell taking away the sinks (taps included), and replacing them with a transparent plastic tube encased in the wall, directly above the squat toilet—the ones that made our hearts beat a little quicker when we stood over them.

This meant that when we wanted a drink of water or to wash a plate or our face we had to do it over the drain that our excrement went into. Sometimes the dungeon became a puddle as by pressing the button on the tube, a jet of water came out, from one and a half meters up, and sprayed the ground. Since we had no bucket or mop, the water stayed on the ground until the next day, when at first light they gave us a broom and sponge and left the bucket on the other side of the bars so we could empty the water into the bucket.

We didn’t even have a table and a chair to sit and eat, or to read and write. In every gesture or action that in any other circumstances would be completely normal, we were reminded of the abnormality of our situation, even by prison standards. At breakfast, lunch, or dinner they reminded us of the same message, which was that we were not worthy enough to be allowed to sit on a chair with our plates on tables. When we wanted to drink or wash our face to wake up in the morning we were reminded that the toilet was the only place we were allowed to carry out our daily ablutions.

If we behaved like animals, they would treat us like animals. This is how they thought. But the reality was that when a human is treated brutally, he can not be asked to behave normally, and the way

we were treated did nothing more than show the true nature of the torturers. In addition to this, they confiscated the small amount of mail that they let us have with the threat that if we didn't return it, we wouldn't get any at all. This was the consequence of my acting up to the guard who wanted to take back Ana's letter. For them we represented the dignity (this is what upset them the most) of those who never submit and who look the torturer in the eye. They could lock us up, but nothing more. They could throw away the keys, erect ten gates, multiply the bars, torture us, and insult us... but nothing more. This frustrated them: they wanted our dignity, to see us beg and crawl like amorphous beings, without personality, broken physically and emotionally.

With the month of November came more X-rays, during which they beat Juan and Pedro. We returned to the bars and started to cut them again. We began to use an old system of communication with cryptographic codes based on letters and numbers that dated back to the Second World War. If you didn't have the code breaker, which consisted of ten numbers, you could not decipher the message even if you knew the logic of the code. It was very secure and mixed in with our chess games, in which we used letters and numbers to coordinate the movements of the pieces. And so it went: the guards had no idea of what we were doing amongst ourselves, but they didn't drop their guard.

One morning, they started to install the electric wires for a close circuit camera in front of the windows and over the wall of the yard, and they also wanted to paint big numbers over all the windows so they could identify them easily and quickly from the camera screen. My companions had to cut the bars quickly if they wanted to continue on with their attempt.

Around this time they let us onto the yard to walk and gave us prison clothes, as it was very cold. They gave each of us some trousers, a jumper, and a corduroy jacket, and took away the jumpsuits. We

were horrified with these rags. A Head Warden and some guards came to talk to me.

“Tarrío, starting today you can go out onto the yard to walk,” he said smiling.

“And the others?” I asked him.

“For now, just you, and depending on your behaviour we might let the rest out. You’ll only get fifteen minutes with a yellow jumpsuit and you’re not allowed to cross the white lines that mark the yard, all right?”

“I’ll pass on the yard.”

“What?”

“I won’t go onto the yard in these conditions and not until we can all go.”

“Fine, too bad...”

They closed the door and went to talk to my companions who gave the same answer, we all go or none of us go. They gave in. We would not accept the white border, so they erased it. We went out, one by one, onto the small yard which had no access to the cell windows. Those of us who exercised started to run to breathe deeply; the others were content with walking to relieve the pressure of three months locked in a cell. We were dressed in yellow jumpsuits so that if we managed to get outside the unit we could be identified and be an easy target for the Guardia Civil. But this was just during exercise time; the rest of the day, locked in the cells, we wore the rags. By now they also left us the mattresses and blankets during the day.

When Juan and Pedro finished cutting the bars, they still hadn’t finished connecting up the CCTV, which we called “the Inquisitor”, so they agreed to act the same afternoon. Juan had cut the bars badly and they refused to give way. The escape was delayed for over an hour while Pedro finished correcting the error, making new cuts. After an hour he cut through the bars and they fell out, making a loud racket. The guards heard it and came into the wing, and they were able to see what had happened through the peepholes. They

ran to raise the alarm while some of them tried to handcuff Pedro. Juan lost no time and left the cell through the bars; all was lost, but he could still get onto the roof and stage a protest. He got down into the yard and came towards the window of my cell, throwing me a rope made of bits of bedsheet. I got hold of one end and tied the other to the bars, enabling him to get up to the window and from there up onto the roof of the unit.

“Keep going,” I said to him through the window.

He gave me two high-fives with the hand he was using to steady the rope, and then he disappeared, armed with a bar, onto the roof. The guards started to lock us all to the gates. In solidarity with my companion I smashed the cell up before they handcuffed me. They were like madmen so I offered no resistance. Juan, for his part, started to break the roof tiles with the bar while shouting at the second grade prisoners who were walking freely on the outside yard.

“Help us, they’re torturing us here!”

The blows from the bar shattered against the tiles ringing out with our hatred. The other prisoners ignored Juan’s shouts, and just stood there watching the entertainment of the small revolt. A group of Guardia Civil came into the prison and instructed Juan to get off the roof. The director also came, who was known by his last name, Moreta, a real bastard, and talked with our companion. He promised not to beat him and to implement some changes in the regime. Juan had no alternative but to give up. He was taken back to a cell and chained up like the rest of us. They then took Juanjo and Barrot down to the floor below and left them uncuffed while the three of us—Juan, Pedro, and I—remained handcuffed with our hands behind our backs. They tried to divide us like this. Juan called to me:

“José, are you chained up too?”

“Just like you,” I answered.

We talked to Pedro and made him feel better. He didn’t have to feel responsible; things played out the way they did and we had to take them however they came; then we would see.

The night was cold and pain filled my arms. The torture began. We tried a hundred positions to no avail, since every movement made it worse. We couldn't stand up or sit down properly at all, and the forced posture along with the cold was maddening. The law was terror written in words and applied in articles; prison, a terror written in the blood of men and women who were enslaved and beaten.

At daybreak several guards and the director came into the cell where Juan was and beat him. I felt real fear and pain, in the darkness of the cell, listening to the shouts of my friend and the dry blows of the batons hitting his body. Juanjo, in the cell below, also heard them and went to the windows to insult them and give them hell. They left my companion and opened the door of the cell I occupied.

"Are the cuffs too tight?"

"A little..." I said, frightened.

Then the guard that was talking bent down and tightened them a little more, digging the steel into my wrists.

"Now that's better, a bit more comfortable isn't it?" he joked.

We spent the rest of the night as best we could. They had tied Juan by his hands and feet to the bed with leather straps. By morning the pain was unbearable but they didn't undo the chains or give us breakfast or lunch. In the afternoon, they released me and shackled Juan to the gate again, as they did with Pedro. After beating the door of the cell repeatedly I succeeded in talking to the Head Warden so that they might at least cuff my companions' hands in front. To succeed I had to threaten to smash the cell again. He conceded. Juan and Pedro were cuffed with their hands in front so at least they avoided the torturous forced posture. They also gave us some sandwiches to eat. Two days later they released them and brought Juanjo and Barrot up to the wing again.

We resumed our daily activities. They gave us access to the newspapers through a schoolteacher who also gave us books. I wanted to finish high school: I had left school in 7th grade. They provided me with textbooks without any problems. I had left the

pain behind but my mind returned to the attitude of the prisoners in El Dueso when faced with Juan's shouts. I soon learned the reason for this passivity. Sixty percent of El Dueso's population were rapists and drug traffickers: pure scum. None of these prisoners wanted to know what happened in here, even though they all knew. Our situation was known throughout all the Spanish jails, well known, but nobody did anything. All those who had talked of friendship, companionship, and struggle, disappeared and hid among the rest when the situation required a popular uprising in the prisons to achieve the conditions that had been demanded. Nobody wanted to know anything about APRE(r) or about solidarity and struggle. The Administration had achieved its objective: to separate us from the rest of the prisoners and use us as an example to make them afraid. The truth was that they had good reasons to be afraid. Who wasn't afraid of a beating and of spending days chained to the bars of a gate, cold and in pain? We were also scared, more scared than anyone.

On the 30th we got some news that excited us, and in a certain way we felt avenged. We read about it in the papers. In the prison in Huesca, Manuel Jesús Castillo Jurado and Carlos Manuel Esteve García had captured five guards, a teacher, and the Head Warden. They demanded a car at the prison gate and an escape route; this was refused and Carlos M. Esteve stabbed the Head Warden about thirty times. To ensure they wouldn't kill him the Directorate promised to put the car at the entrance. The two prisoners then allowed the Head Warden to be taken to hospital and negotiations were resumed. The director of the prison, Otal Tolosama, gave them their own car with a full tank of gas, and opened all the doors to the street, facilitating the escape. With two hostages the two prisoners left the jail, got into the car, and escaped. Once free of their pursuers, they released the hostages without harming them. They had done it! They had ridiculed the Administration to its face. We applauded the actions of these two brave men, whose escape we celebrated and

talked about through the windows. Juan and I knew Carlos Esteve from serving time together. When Manuel Sevilleno died in prison (he was a GRAPO member who died on hunger strike), Esteve and Juan were the only ones to occupy a roof with a banner protesting the tortures that political prisoners were suffering.

The media dismissed the action in Huesca as the work of inhuman psychopaths, but the reality was that this hard and brutal action, as cruel as the system it was born from, was a lot more than actions of psychopaths. Both prisoners who escaped had AIDS and were fleeing from a certain death in prison. They wanted to die free and this was something the Administration would never allow.

There are about thirty-five thousand AIDS carriers in prison, many of whom die inside: many more than the prison Administration would admit. They manipulate the statistics, freeing the sick a couple of days before they died or better yet (in more than one known case) granting them freedom after they had died, taking fingerprints from the corpses with the goal of not admitting they were in prison at their time of death. The infirmaries and prison hospitals were full of walking corpses, bags of skin wandering with sunken eyes and lost looks in the prison corridors, irredeemably condemned to die locked up and far from their loved ones. The prison yards were inundated with drugs and the HIV positive patients consumed them day by day until a night came when they left for the hospital and didn't come back; this when they weren't found dead in bed in the morning or sitting on the couch in the common room. It's terrible. What happens in prison to AIDS patients would make you sick.

In December, they moved Pedro to Longroño, but otherwise El Dueso remained the same. The Director, Moreta, who had been nicknamed *Mofeta* (the Skunk), continued, along with his colleague Enrique Acín, the medical director, to authorize the taking of X-rays by force. The days dragged on. They finished installing the CCTV cameras and over every window they painted the numbers

of the cells to identify us better. From now on a mechanical eye, *el inquisidor*, would constantly film images of everything we did at the windows. They put metal plates between the windows to stop us passing things to each other; they also installed a double row of crossed bars outside the windows. It was impossible to cut these; we could barely reach our hands through these grates full of bars. Cell searches were carried out daily and we had to strip twice a day. When we went out to the yard, we wore the yellow jumpsuit and had our hands cuffed behind our backs and were made to wear flip-flops (which stopped us from moving quickly). Once on the yard, they took our handcuffs off through the bars of the door and gave us sports shoes to run which we had to give back before returning to the cells. They also gave each of us an AM radio the size of a wallet. I knuckled down to passing my high school exam and to reading Miguel Delibes, Stendhal, Dumas, Homer, and some other authors who fascinated me by their captivating style of writing. It was incredible what a human being could discover in books when in isolation that was this absolute. You could discover new worlds crafted by the magic of the author. They were, no doubt, wonderful methods of escape.

I had a blood test done which told me again that I was HIV positive. My immune system defences wavered around 500 T4, so, according to the quacks I was doing all right; I wasn't dying, at least not of AIDS. The doctors came to visit us regularly, but the relationship was cold and full of an obvious hate that impeded any dialogue or human closeness. How could we believe in the professionalism of those who remained silent about torture and took X-rays without our consent? They denied everything we asked for and cruelly mocked us, showing us that they were openly part of the Administration and that they understood and approved of what we were subjected to in this regime. They simply followed orders; and believed that this could clear their rotten consciences, this and the possibility of rapid promotion.

We grew accustomed to living with the seagulls. There were two of them we nicknamed “Blackfoot” and “Hoodie”. Juan really enjoyed them.

“Juanjo! Look at Hoodie, she looks like she’s coming from a hold-up...”

The worst one, though, was the one with the black feet, Juanjo’s favourite. He spent all day throwing himself at the others, pecking them from behind to rob their food. There were other big ones, that we generically nicknamed “the bitches”. We made fun of them by throwing them pieces of meat so big they couldn’t swallow them. This stopped them from taking flight so they slammed themselves against the concrete. They would then vomit up the meat and take flight, weakened and bewildered that they couldn’t take the bounty. They were important entertainment for us.

I received an interesting letter from Ana, a social worker who we had taken hostage in Tenerife 2. In the letter she thanked me for my humanity during the kidnapping and for not harming anyone after all they had done to me. She asked my forgiveness for all I had suffered in jail and told me she was leaving this line of work. I liked her letter because in it there was a clear critique of the prison system and a recognition of our struggle, even if she was not in agreement with our methods. I tried to write her a letter but tore it up. What was the point? We had acted humanely with them, without abusing any of them, without taking revenge, and what had changed?

At the end of the month, Carlos Esteve and his escape companion Manuel Castillo were captured in a flat in a Barcelona neighbourhood, where they were attacked by the GEOS. Carlos was brought to El Dueso with us, and his companion to Badajoz. We were all together for the death knells of 1991.

The month of January started with repression. They would take Carlos out onto the yard in handcuffs, so we protested and I refused

to go on to the yard. Carlos did the same. One afternoon several guards wanted him to strip and be cavity searched and he refused, so they came into his cell and beat him. We all felt an enormous helplessness. I insulted them:

“Sons of bitches! Abusing us like this, cowards...”

Some guards approached the door of my cell.

“Are you saying something in there, faggot?” shouted one of them.

“I’m not doing anything.”

“Then keep it that way.”

I stopped so they wouldn’t beat me as well. Juan called me:

“What happened, José?”

“They beat Carlos.”

“Are you all right, Carlos?” we asked him.

“I’m fine. They only hit me a few times, it doesn’t matter.” He said this to calm us down.

We were undeniably scared. If you beat on the door you knew they would come in force and beat you with impunity, and then, almost certainly, you would spend at least that night handcuffed to the gate, which was even worse. Their methods were thought out to divide us, to make us—through pain—individualists, and afraid of the reprisals. There would be hard times, very difficult moments, in which we would have to be united in order to avoid them reaching their objective of destroying us.

The food was the same as in every prison: terrible. It consisted of rice, chick peas, bacon, soups made of scraps, for the most part, and lots of potatoes. Supplements and access to the shop were forbidden, so we were usually hungry.

I received authorisation from the Court to visit with my friend Ana, but the Administration intervened and made a call from the Directorate to her house. They talked with her parents and told them I was a dangerous criminal—that I wanted to use their daughter to plan an escape and a string of lies like this. Ana’s parents forbid her

to come and see me. She wrote me an urgent letter to tell me she wouldn't come to see me or write to me again and wished me luck. They had succeeded in disrupting our relationship and stopping the communication. This saddened me a lot, since I had hoped for a stronger personality from this woman. Juan knew about her, we had chatted about her months before in Tenerife 2. I told him about it:

“Relax, José, I know it's hard since you loved her, but they'll pay for it some day.”

“Yes, some day they'll pay for everything, but I'm disappointed with her attitude, Juan.”

“People often aren't what they seem...”

“Yes, that's true.”

We heard the news on the radio of Antoni Asunción getting bail for the charges of torture of eleven FIES prisoners in Seville 2. At the same time, the mistreatment of prisoners in Spanish jails was denied by the media, which portrayed us as recalcitrant and unresponsive to punishment, as extraordinarily dangerous prisoners, which necessitated the isolation that we were subjected to, and which they had a right to force on us. It was curious; they kept using the word *right*. Were we really living in a state of rights? I didn't think so. They talked about the freedom of expression but I couldn't have a conversation with my lawyer or my family, unless I accepted the censorship that prevented me from talking about the FIES regime. The right to the presumption of innocence was also recognised, while thirteen thousand inmates—twenty-five percent of the prison population—were rotting in dungeons, awaiting trial. It was recognised, too, that prisoners had the right to serve their sentences in their respective communities, near their homes, to avoid familial disruption; but, in reality, these families would have to be millionaires to afford the visiting expenses, which drained their family finances and risked their lives on the highways in long journeys to come see their loved ones in prisons. Terminally ill inmates (not dead ones!),

had the right to be released under Article 60 but they died in cold cells or were released a day before their deaths. They had proclaimed that the prisons were institutions charged with the reintegration of convicts but in reality they had turned them into twentieth century leper colonies, gruesome AIDS wards, and warehouses of hate where they increased their criminal abilities.

I continued my studies, which posed me no problems. The medical service gave glasses to Juanjo, Juan, and I after several months of us insisting on having them. Reading and the confined space slowly devoured a prisoner's eyesight and we were no exception. They also instructed me to take medicine to fortify my immune system, but I refused it. We continued our games of chess through the windows (they had stopped taking the paper boards away from us) and we held long conversations, which, at times, culminated in arguments due to the tension that had built up in us. It made sense: all of us had spent years in isolation and this had an impact on us. Neuroses and mild schizophrenia had made their appearance and we needed the occasional argument as safety valves to let off steam and adrenaline and not go crazy.

Pedro was transferred back from Logroño. We called to him through the windows.

"What happened to you?" asked Juan.

"I made some complaints about your situation and they took me straight back here for sticking up for you."

"Well, we're doing all right here," I intervened, "how is it out there?"

"You can imagine it, José, just like everywhere else. People go on and don't think about anything else except drugs or getting out in some way or another. Who's in here now?"

"The same, plus Carlos from the events in Huesca, who came here at the end of December."

“And how have things been here?”

“Same as always, but now they leave us the mattresses, a radio, and some other things. They still have the daily searches and X-rays and other bullshit,” Juanjo explained.

“Does the camera work now?”

“Yes.”

“Did they take X-rays when you arrived?” asked Juan.

“Yes and they hit me for refusing them. Finally they dragged me from the van to the infirmary, strapped me to the table, stripped me, and did them.”

“Assholes. Were the doctors there?” I asked.

“Yes, one doctor and an assistant director, that Acín guy.”

“We should cut their heads off,” said Juan.

He then asked Carlos:

“Carlos, do you think the seagulls would eat the body of the pig?”

“Are you referring to Acín?” asked Carlos.

“Of course...”

“I think they’d have him stripped to the bone in five minutes.”

We all laughed in a chorus.

The repression was harsh, so as a rule most of our conversations revolved around the disgust we felt towards the prison doctors and the guards. And they knew it, since they heard us; that is why the repression became personal. The situation hardened us all day by day. We were not the only ones subjected to the intense pressure; the guards also began to experience it. From our looks full of hate and resentment and from our conversations, they guessed, or knew, that if ever they were to make a mistake we would pay them back blow for blow, and they had hit us a lot. They were afraid, despite the extraordinary security measures, that one of these madmen would manage to breach the security and take them hostage after all that had been done to them. Their dread was so extreme that they only allowed us to shave with electric razors and prohibited us from getting yoghurt containers, drinking glasses, or metal trays. They cut

the toothbrushes in half and only gave us toothpaste when they collected our food trays, after we had eaten; more evidence of their dread. Even when the judges or judicial agents came to serve us documents or take statements for some reason, we weren't let out of our cages. The judge or agent stood in the corridor and interrogated us through the many bars of the gate, escorted by several guards who stopped us from approaching them. We used these occasions to protest against our situation, but they ignored us.

"This is a matter for the JVP."

This reminded me of Article 24 of the Spanish Constitution which guaranteed the protection of the courts; in no case should we be undefended. It was clear that we were exceptional cases, a special matter for the State, and so everything was allowed in order to fight us. But were the laws not the same for everybody?

Carlos finally started to be let onto the yard without handcuffs, and we both left the cells. We started to send protests to the outside, to various legal bodies, to no avail. They shelved all the complaints or passed them on to the JVP, which was the same thing. The Judges of Instruction, the Provincial Audiences, the College of Lawyers, the Dean of the Supreme Court, all, absolutely all of them, shelved our letters using any excuse. Nobody wanted to know anything about the FIES regime because they had orders not to interfere in the dirty war of the prison system against a group of vandals who had broken the existing order.

In February they allowed us access to the shop and I resumed the vice of smoking. Some of us had money taken for objects we had broken in the cells but those who had shared equally with those who did not. There was a great feeling of solidarity in this, and in other basic feelings to be able to survive in prison. The Directorate and the guards didn't like it as it made us stronger and they decided to prohibit us from sharing things we bought or buying things for those who had nothing. The attempt was quite crude; Carlos

protested to the JVP and won. The judge ordered that an inmate could not be prevented from buying something for another inmate. Even while the judge was making his decision we got around it by sending packages through the windows. Once more, in the worst circumstances the strength of our solidarity surpassed the gratuitous cruelty of the penal system.

Barrot started to become more withdrawn and seemed unreachable, and he once talked about his intention to commit suicide, which he also talked about to the prison psychologist. Day by day the regime got harder, the silence increased, and the cells started to get more sorrowful. The process of brutalisation was slow, but relentless.

My health noticeably deteriorated. Despite this, I tried to run for a few minutes daily and maintained a level of fitness that avoided atrophy. They carried out some new tests on me and, as my defences were low, they advised me to take anti-retroviral medication, which I refused to do. The medications that existed to deter the virus were a farce that only benefited big pharmaceutical companies. They experimented on prisoners in a savage, brutal manner. They gave you medication with unknown side effects on HIV positive patients, simply handing it out as if it were aspirin. I had decided not to take AIDS medication some time ago. I knew that it was an incurable disease and that, therefore, death— nothing more than a natural process of life—was inevitable, the price we all had to pay some day to perpetuate the species. I wouldn't lend myself to the experiments of medical teams that collaborated with the Administration in the denial of Article 60 of the Prison Regulations to seriously ill prisoners.

Around this time I received a letter, several months late, from Chico's girlfriend. They gave it to me with the food.

Hello José,

How are you? I hope when this letter reaches you that you are in perfect health, as well as spirit. I'm here, to be honest with you, with

my morale in pieces, but anyway, I'll continue...

Listen, Che, before anything I want to say that I'm sorry for not writing sooner, you should have had this letter some time ago, but... believe me it wasn't because I didn't try. I'm in Carabanchel now. When I came back here I tried to write to you to tell you what happened. Firstly I felt very bad and needed to unburden myself onto someone and when I didn't find anyone suitable I picked up a pen to write to you on more than one occasion but I didn't send the letters...but I couldn't and didn't want to accept what had happened. The second reason was because I am still very conscious of how much he loved you and because I know he would have wanted you to hear it from me before you heard it from someone else: Chico is dead...

In September, when I went to prison, he spent a few days in hospital with pneumonia, and was discharged voluntarily. Then they found him with some guns connected to a robbery on an armoured van and locked him up. It was all more or less fine, but the pneumonia came back and you know how these things go, and of course they give you flu medicine for everything. He was held for two weeks while in terrible shape, with a fever of 40 degrees, and they didn't do a damn thing for him, until he began to break out in psoriasis and they decided to move him to the hospital. But it was too late for him, in the first place because he saw that things were bad and began to go and secondly because the pneumonia was complicated by his damaged kidney. A month after he had been admitted he was given an Article 60 release but he was half dead; his mother took him home. Early one morning, he awoke completely swollen. He was taken to hospital in an ambulance where he died with his lungs full of blood...

As far as who was by his side. It's sad, but there was no one there, only his family and mine. No one else, and it hurts, really hurts, to think of it. He didn't deserve this, not him. They didn't dignify him with an appearance at the wake, not Pelirrojo or el Priso or Barato or Nacho, no one paid him their respects...

I would like to write you some more but I've spent an agonising time with this knot around my neck and I can't write any more. I hope that you understand and forgive me.

*With love, your paisana,
Sandra*

When I was still a child, I stumbled on my first ideas of what banditry was, and it amazed me. After being sent to boarding school where my rebellion flourished, there was only one path for me and this was it. The idea of delinquency fascinated me. I imagined it as something admirable that everyone would respect. Along with other delinquent youths, I started along my path outside the law and I was surrounded with friends and girls. This made me happy, and I was far from understanding that it was a world of fantasy, real in the moment, but soon to dissolve, giving way to a harsh reality, a prohibited and persecuted way of life. From out of all this, Eduardo Jean Baptiste Álvarez without a doubt had been the best, along with Isabel. The rest of it had been lies and self-interest on the part of the others. Little by little, the romantic idea I had of this world was washed down the drain by drugs and I gained first-hand knowledge of human misery. So this letter didn't surprise me when it notified me that my friend had been in agony for days, lying in a hospital bed without any one-time "friends" dignifying him with a visit, to accompany him, to say goodbye to him. I understood and shared the pain of his companion, but inside me this pain was turned into hate. Many of these people, whom I had believed to be honest, brave people, turned out to be nothing more than people full of vanity and nasty egotism. These attitudes repulsed me and I refused to accept that everyone thought like this. For me there still existed, despite everything, a difference that made me choose to live outside the law and a rotten system: *dignity*. The dignity to live with your head held high as one who has chosen to live with the consequences of all his actions, the dignity to make mistakes and accept the errors,

the dignity to be a free man who still has a large place in his heart for hope and friendship.

I responded passionately to this letter and, as a tribute to the one who had been my best friend, I sent out several requests to have flowers put on the grave of this man who knew how to conduct himself. His death, put simply, took a piece of me away, and meant I would always keep him in my soul.

March came with some bad news. Juan's father died and they refused to take him to see him for the last time. Meanwhile in Valladolid, the Judge of Penitentiary Vigilance had been offered a promotion to the Supreme Court to silence his criticisms of the FIES regime, which he accepted. They tried to do the same thing to Manuela Carmena, the judge from the judicial system most critical of the Penal Administration, who they named as a senior member of the Madrid courts. Prisoners owed a lot to this woman; she had behaved with humanity towards many of us and for this they kicked her out. The Administration cleaned house and other judges came in. Likewise they confirmed, as director of Seville 2, Rafael Fernández Cubero and promoted the assistant director, Antonio de Drago—directly responsible for the tortures in Seville 2—to director of the prison in Melilla. They subjected us to more X-ray sessions, strapping us down naked again to the shackles that had been fixed to the table. They gave us our own clothes and took back the horrible suits, although they still forced us to strip to exit the cell and to wear the plastic sandals. They persisted in handcuffing us behind our backs, as well as the rest of the security measures, for all except Juanjo, who was allowed onto the yard without chains. Also they started to allow us telephone calls, one a month, for which they installed a telephone beside one of the gates in the corridor. Phone calls meant being handcuffed by one hand, leaving the other one free to use the phone that they gave us through the bars after they had made the call and recorded the number.

Sometimes, during the humiliating searches, we got into violent confrontations with the guards. They continued to strip us twice a day, when leaving to go to the yard and during the nightly searches: when, along with the daily shower after exercise time, we were forced to be naked in front of them without any privacy. Mail continued to take an eternity to reach us, and the large majority of letters were torn up into the trash cans of the offices of those running the institution. They had changed some aspects as regards clothing, yard time, and communication (although we were still censored) but the basic aspects of the regime remained the same in the hands of experienced torturers (sons of torturers themselves) commanded by José Antonio Moreta: a repulsive, cowardly being. He exemplified the typical prison director who made himself bigger through having power over the prisoners without recognising anyone's ability to act or think outside the rules. The prisoner support organisation Salhaketa had visited the prison several times through their lawyers but they had not been allowed to interview the prisoners. All this, day after day, week after week, month after month, took its toll on us.

Barrot started to have serious psychological and physical problems. He was paying the price of living a life dedicated to drug addiction and his liver had bad periods every day, which was related to the AIDS virus he carried. He thought about his situation constantly, plunging into the depths of desperation. He had a fight with Juan and, becoming even more withdrawn, medicated his brain and his body with a mountain of tranquilizers that the prison doctors administered three times a day with his food. He needed these drugs to escape from the reality that was eating him: the total isolation and the idea of AIDS. I knew from experience how he felt; at some periods I had also needed sedatives to sleep—suffering from tachycardia or states of exceptional anxiety that made me feel overwhelmingly claustrophobic—but I had used them only temporarily. It was a mistake to keep on using this medication because with time it took possession of you—an error that would cost Barrot his life. They did

not give him food supplements or offer him vitamins or allow him to escape the murderous X-ray sessions but drugs, drugs they gave him as much as he wanted so he would remain sedated and tranquil. The jails all worked the same way: heroin and all manner of drugs came in and freely circulated so that the inmate population would stay peaceful and not fight, so that they were not even aware of the reality they lived in. When they didn't have drugs, the atmosphere was tense and the prisoners irritable, and that is why there were and always would be drugs in prison. FIES was not meant for those who dealt drugs in prison; it was reserved for those who protested against the conditions.

When April arrived, the winter cold left and the starlings came back. One afternoon, reading the paper, Juanjo read an article about a writing competition that had a prize for the best short story. We talked about it through the windows and decided to enter some stories in the competition, but we didn't finish them. Nonetheless, at Juanjo's insistence that we write something, it occurred to us to write a small book about escapes. He called to us:

"What do you think about writing a book on escapes to pass the time?" he said to us through the window.

"Sounds good to me," answered Carlos.

I talked to Juan about it.

"What do you think, Juan?" I asked.

"It's all the same to me if you want to write about our escape, but make sure to mention informants among the prisoners so that people who read it will learn to be cautious."

I told Juanjo that we were in agreement and he began to write about Barrot's last escape and Pedro wrote about his. It was for entertainment, although we also thought we could publish it some day and make some money. Carlos suggested the idea that one of the starlings that had made a nest in a hole in one of the yard walls, in front of the windows, could be the narrator of the stories. We

spent those days preparing the rough draft of a book that would become *Adios Prisons* and which eventually did get published. We would have liked, at least I would have, to make it even bigger, to collect all the stories of what we had done and what had happened in the prisons, but it was not feasible, since it would never get past the daily searches of our cells and belongings. One day, some of us would have to write a more complete history, which would explain why all the escapes and other events had happened.

Apart from all this, Carlos wrote poetry, which he read to me sometimes. It was curious that a man accused of being soulless by the Administration took shelter in such pretty sentiments. They were beautiful love poems or ones denouncing the human injustice of powerful men oppressing others. I continued my studies, constantly broadening my mind. I read books by all types of authors. Juanjo studied history, which he was passionate about. We spent hours talking about history, especially the Civil War, the Greeks, or my favourite subject: the Celts and the *Irmandinhos*. Juanjo poked fun at me affectionately, remembering my ideas about Galicia when we had known each other in Daroca and I dreamed of liberating my land.

“You look like an *Irmandinho* with that peasant face of yours,” he would say.

“And you look like an imperialist Castilian from Valladolid, land of fascists.”

Then we started to laugh. Juan, absorbed in a pursuit of everything political that the radio vomited up, always listened to the news on the hour and the half hour. After this, he came to the window to excitedly tell us the news and comment on something or tell someone to tune in to a certain frequency. Pedro became immersed in writing to the Juzgados, but participated in nearly all the conversations; he was a great talker with an excellent sense of humour. He didn’t read a lot, but he liked some history books. Some days I shouted to him to help me with equations or mathematical problems I had from time to time in my assignments. As for Barrot,

he continued to sink into an internal ostracism full of paranoia, full of drugs day and night. He didn't even exercise. Carlos, who saw clearly what he was going through, tried to make him understand his problems, but the talks went nowhere. He had become totally absorbed and alienated. Carlos's attitude, always thinking of others and seeing clearly when a person needed help, was admirable.

Sometimes the pressure of the isolation regime caused us to argue, often quite angrily, but above all we still held intact our human values, principles, and an ethic that they wouldn't manage to break. APRE(r) had fallen apart. The ideas that had united the many prisoners who were now suffering a corrosive repression had disappeared, and the majority didn't want to know anything about all this—only looking to get out of their personal situations as soon as possible. Among us, there existed different points of view about this, but we maintained our solidarity and helped one another. All of us had something in common that identified us irredeemably: true rebellion. The six of us were escapees and, whether we were in agreement about methods or not, we all naturally despised the prison system. This was undeniable and kept us united. They couldn't catch us all.

The Administration installed an enormous metal plate between each cell window so that we could only see what was directly in front of us, although it didn't obstruct the view of the CCTV camera, *el inquisidor*. They had also removed the toilet from the yard so we were forced to piss in a drain in the middle. There were times when Juan would show his fingers under one of the yard doors, which I could just see from my cell window. It was a little greeting, not much else, but at least I felt a visual contact of some kind with another human being who wasn't a jailer. Gestures like this one or the faces of my companions seen passing in front of the glass spy hole in the door, always escorted by four thugs, was all the human contact we could aspire to here. That and shouted conversations. And if for an instant we forgot where we were living, we were subjected to a new series of X-rays. We objected but were taken in chains with our arms

behind our backs by ten guards to the infirmary and once more strapped down onto the table, our trousers and underwear removed and our shirts pulled up as they took the lethal photographs of the inside of our stomachs. This was democracy.

In May, I was transferred to a trial at the prison in Bonxe. I left El Dueso around six in the afternoon and arrived at Lugo around midnight, in a special convoy during which I was given no food or water. Upon arriving at Bonxe prison, they locked me up, after a strip search, in one of the intake cells with my hands still cuffed in front of me. There were a couple of blankets in the cell.

“Hey, don’t you have any sheets?” I asked the Head Warden.

“Not for you, just what there is now.”

“And the handcuffs?” I asked him.

“We’ll leave them on, since we’ll come get you at six and take you to the court in Pontevedra.”

When they closed the door I took the key out of its hiding place and took the cuffs off. I fell fully dressed onto the mattress and covered myself with a blanket to await the transfer. I couldn’t sleep, despite being exhausted. Every hour a guard shone a light in the cell and checked that I was still inside. I thought that, definitely, these people were imbeciles, real dimwits, doing things like this, amusing themselves doing unnecessary things to people they had in their power. Was it possible they believed that after two hours in a prison someone could escape without knowing anything about the place? It was absurd.

I waited until four in the morning when the guard came again, to get up and piss. While I pissed, enjoying the real toilet, with my left hand leaning on the wall, I noticed the metal tube that carried the water to the tank. After pissing, I got up on the tank and touched it. It was strong. I had two hours to work on it, so I turned the water off by turning a small handle attached to it. With a small piece of a saw that Juan had given me in El Dueso and that I had managed

to hold onto despite all the searches, I cut through the metal tube. Without any delay, I flattened it completely and made a vertical cut to sharpen it. Then I filed it down. I lay back in bed and waited for the next visit before putting the finishing touches to this improvised knife. Once the guard had gone by I re-cut it in such a way that I could put it in my anus without putting myself in excessive danger. After putting it in a garbage bag I found and making it into a cylinder, I heated the plastic with a lighter so that it wouldn't come loose and smoothed it out. Then I smeared it with soap and put it inside, not without discomfort. Now I had a weapon, even if it was basic, and so I had a chance, which was better than nothing. Among us, being practical was something natural and necessary, a question of survival that was more important than remaining a virgin.

At six in the morning I heard the steps of the guards, unmistakable in the prison corridor, coming towards the cell. I put on the cuffs and hid the saw and the key. When the door opened a large group of prison guards and some Guardia Civil took me out to the corridor and searched me. Then they changed the cuffs for other ones and took me to the police van and led me inside. Before leaving Bonxe, I took out the knife; after taking off the plastic, I stashed it. I cleaned the shit off my hands with some pieces of wet toilet paper I had kept in one of my pockets for the occasion. We left for prison in Monterroxo where we would pick up my friend Izquierdo Trancho. Trancho was a brave guy, so I could count on him to be ready to try something. When we reached Monterroxo, we had to wait a few minutes while they brought Trancho out. He arrived smiling and sat down beside me. We started off again for Court No. 2 in Pontevedra.

"What's going on, José?"

"I'm good, and you?"

"I'm doing well. Do you want to see if we can make something happen?"

"Yes," and smiling I added, taking out the knife, "look what I

have.”

“Wow, how did you get it in here?” he asked while weighing it in his hand.

“Up my ass, how else? I made it by flattening a metal tube from a cistern. It’s not big but it will serve its purpose if we can get to the judge during the hearing. What do you say?”

“You know I don’t have a problem with that. We’ll have to take our cuffs off, though. If they don’t we can’t do a thing.”

“Good,” I answered. “And how is Jaén?”

“A shithole but not as bad as El Dueso. I’ve heard they’re killing you in there, right?”

“Yes, it’s pretty bad.”

“Well, in Jaén, we’re fighting with the guards every day.”

We continued talking about all this until we reached Pontevedra. There, we took off our cuffs and put pieces of cardboard between the teeth of them and closed them up again so the cardboard stopped the clasps. We only had to give them a good jerk to open them up.

We were escorted inside to the courtroom in front of journalists and photographers. They put us in a small waiting room, watched over by a large number of Guardia Civil and Policía Nacional. The hours before an action are the worst; we spent them smoking and chatting. I was grateful for the presence of my friend and he put me at ease. The trial time arrived and something happened that we weren’t counting on: several Guardia Civil handcuffed themselves to us with other cuffs. They had fucked us.

We walked into the room and we had a trial for a charge of disrespect from a letter we had sent to a judge, insulting him. We tried to protest the situation we were going through in prison but they turned a deaf ear to our statements. The judge asked me in a paternalistic tone:

“How is it that you, still so young, end up in situations like this?”

“Because justice is dealt out by bastards like you,” I blurted out to

him. He turned a variety of colours, since he wasn't expecting such a response. Trancho intervened.

"You," he said to the judge and the prosecutor, "are the ones in need of rehabilitation, since you're all rotten. How can you call yourselves judges if you're no better than worms? It's you and your fucking system that needs to be rehabilitated, bastards!..."

Among insults and mockery of the law and justice they took us from the court and brought us back to the van.

"Sons of bitches!" exclaimed my friend once we were inside.

"They stole the candy right out of our mouths," I said to him. Then I laughed and added, "if that asshole of a judge just knew how close he was to being our hostage."

"We were unlucky, buddy."

We got rid of the knife since we wouldn't be needing it for anything and we returned to prison chatting and enjoying the time we had together before we were sent back to isolation in a punishment cell. In Monterroxo we said goodbye with a big hug. When we reached Bonxe they took me to the cell I had occupied the night before, took off the handcuffs and gave me clean sheets and food, treating me much better than on my arrival.

The following morning I went back to El Dueso. I enjoyed the landscape of my homeland and felt a certain nostalgia, as I was filled with memories. Without a doubt I was enamoured with this beautiful part of the world, and viewed with sympathy the armed struggle that was taken up by the militants of *Exercito Guerrilheiro*, although most of these men and women were jailed in the prisons of the state whose power they fought against. They kept alive old stories of anti-fascist resistance, names of guerrillas like Foucelhas, Piloto, Reboiras, all murdered by Francoists. In these mountains they had mounted one of the bloodiest struggles against fascism after the victory of the military junta in the Civil War, a heroic resistance betrayed by the Communist Party of Carillo and Pasionaria. Among these people

one of the most revolutionary peasantry movements in the history of feudal Europe had grown: the *Irmandinha* revolution. Thousands of peasants had taken up arms against the oppression and misery of the tyrants of that age. I admired *Exercito Guerrilheiro*, and the news had reached even me of the tortures they were being subjected to in prisons like Alcalá-Meco, where the prisoners refused to respect the rules or attend roll call, for which they received terrible beatings. I knew little of politics but enough to understand that Spain was a centralist state built on top of the freedom of other historic peoples and created through conquest, abuse, and exploitation. I admired these people because they had openly confronted the drug traffickers, the slobbering scumbags who exterminated the youth with adulterated drugs—the same ones who had driven to their death the large majority of friends with whom I had played as a child in the fields of this land before the inundation of drugs and misery. And I would always remember, with love and affection, Xosé Vilhar Rogueiro and Lola Castro Lama who died trying to free us from this scourge that was protected by a democracy that opened its legs to the highest bidder.

*In the grey skies of our simple village
you can see red stars, crossed with blue,
winged souls of dead guerrillas,
free, full of light.*

We arrived in the afternoon. As I expected, I was taken straight to the infirmary, where new X-rays were taken. After making sure I was not carrying anything that could constitute a danger to the good and orderly functioning of the prison, they took me to the cell. There they stripped me and searched my clothes. When they left, I went to the window and greeted my companions and shared with them some of the details of my journey (not all of them, since we were constantly being listened to).

On the 23rd, I turned twenty-four years old. Sometimes my age betrayed me. I was still a young man and even though I played at being older there were things that only time and experience would teach me. My character was quite violent and short-tempered, above all when I thought I was right about something; it was difficult for me to recognise my own ignorance. But I would learn. I would learn what should be a necessary lesson in the apprenticeship of all human beings: humanity and humility. I wanted my evolution and social emancipation to be accompanied by a human revolution inside me that would make me better, more tolerant, and more human. I was grateful to my companions for their patience with me and their efforts to accept me as I was—introverted and disagreeable, but capable of a noble devotion for any one of them. We all had affectionate nicknames: Carlos we started calling *Simpson*, Juanjo was *Doctor*, Pedro was known as *Sleepy*, Juan as *Bubbles*, and they called me *Norman*. Barrot was still stuck in his own world and scarcely came to his window, except for some specific issue, for example, to give Juan facts about his last escape to be narrated in *Adios Prisons*.

For the most part, the regime continued the same, so monotonous as to be unbearable. We had spent months together and some of us had known each other for years. This—together with the few serious matters we could discuss, being under constant surveillance—made most of the conversations dull, without content or meaning. In truth it was overwhelming. One thing that broke the routine was to watch, from the windows, a group of starlings building a nest atop one of the walls, watching them come and go with small twigs in their beaks or with bits of cotton, or walking on the yard pecking at some fruit. There was also a dove, who must have belonged to a prisoner, and to whom we would throw breadcrumbs that it pecked at with the usual peacefulness of these birds. Even the seagulls seemed bored.

In June a rebellion unfolded in the prison of Alcalá-Meco, during

which one of the prisoners died from stab wounds, which was a settling of accounts carried out by Moisés Caamániz Álvarez, a young man of twenty-two. Several days after the riot he was transferred and they put him in the first cell next to Juan. There were now seven of us. The day of his arrival, Carlos asked him the reason why, yet again, a prisoner had died during a riot, and his response was the following story, more or less.

The dead man had been the cause of the descent into drugs and prostitution of Moisés's younger sister. Several months beforehand, this girl had died from an overdose. When Moisés learned that this prisoner was the cause of his sister's downfall and met him in the same unit in Alcalá-Meco, he kidnapped a guard from the unit and went after him. He killed him and, before surrendering and handing over the kidnapped guard, he demanded the presence of the JVP and protested against the beatings and mistreatment of the youth in Alcalá-Meco. To illustrate this, he made the judge interview a companion of his who was in isolation, with a broken arm in a cast and marks from a beating at the hands of the guards. After this he gave up, and days later he was transferred to El Dueso. This was the story he told, which wasn't to say we didn't hear any other versions of the incident.

Around this time, Juan had an outburst and, fed up with the pressure that the cells caused, tore out the window and trashed the cell, completely destroying it. The guards rushed in, subdued him and cuffed him to the gate with his hands behind his back. The medical director arrived.

"Now we're going to give you an injection to calm your nerves, you piece of shit!" he threatened.

Juan called Carlos and me, shouting:

"José! Carlos...!"

I went to the window.

"What's going on, Juan?" I asked him anxiously. In the unit you could feel the tension rising in the painful silence.

"They want to inject me..." he answered, scared.

It was no joke. These Modecate injections they administered to calm prisoners down were capable of leaving a man knocked out for two weeks with no strength or capacity to think. It was dangerous, since just one of these injections in a sane person could have serious psychological results. I was as scared as he was, but he was my friend, and I started slamming on my door. Carlos called out to me:

"What are you going to do?"

"Talk with them and ask them not to give it to him, of course."

I started banging again and Carlos joined me until the Head Warden came to the cell. They opened the door.

"What's going on?" he asked me.

"The doctor is threatening to give my friend an injection by force and that's not all right," I explained to him calmly. "If Juan has damaged his cell it's because the regime is hard, you know that, and it's logical that someone crosses the line one day. His father died recently; I think it's logical and normal that he feels like this."

"This is a matter for the doctor and not us, Tarrio."

"Very well, but know that if they give him an injection, *I'm* going to destroy my cell, along with the rest of my companions and you'll have to come in and handcuff me, because I won't stop."

"Fine, fine, no need for any more threats, okay? Calm down. We'll go talk to Don Enrique and see if we can let it go this time, all right?"

"Fine, and another thing," I added, "uncuff him."

"We'll see."

Carlos said something similar to him. To calm Juan down, I communicated to Juan what we had talked about:

"Relax Juanito, let's see if they let you out of the cuffs and this ends... How are you doing?"

"Fine. I just lost it for a bit..."

They didn't come back to give him the injection, and a few hours later they let him out of the handcuffs and moved him to

another cell.

Pedro won some more concessions from the JVP and they authorised us to have one more hour on the yard. On the outside, Salhaketa and the Human Rights Association of Spain were composing reports about our situation, right after a mountain of copies of protest letters and petitions had reached them through our lawyers.

I received a card from Musta, who was in Puerto de Santa María:

Dear Xosé,

When I get ready to wield the pen, my ideas wander and I never finish what I start... it all seems too small or imperfect. I can't even begin to express the basics of what I would like to say, to convey. I believe the lines I've written are insufficient, that I am confused, and that more than anything I want to convey much that I can't through this abstract medium.

Beloved soul brother... do you understand me? This dense and profound feeling called friendship knows well how much I miss you and regrets how little I can do for you... You should understand this passionate fury that you are for me and yet these wild waves smash themselves against the rocks on the shores of my limits... how sad!... what anger!

Sometimes as I wander through the ideas of whoever I'm reading, I avoid so much of this miserable world, I get so lost in what I'm taking in, that when I "awaken" from travelling I feel unknown, like an alien. I feel detached from all material things, from all frivolities, and my old vanity has succumbed to the charms of worthy dignity.

They can never, my brother, lock up the love I feel for justice and a dignified life, as they can never silence what I say from my inner pulpit. My body is a loyal soldier to humanity and to the libertarian ideas of my beloved Peter Kropotkin. I can't conceive of life without an aspiration to leave humanity a record of dignity and struggle in our persons and actions.

In life there are millions of people who because of their lack of

character don't become anything more than millions of people. We only know by their legacy a few hundred individual men and women, made singular by their revolutionary ideas and actions. In reviewing the revolutions of individual mortals, I have understood deeply that they have never made amends for the eternal slaves of society: the prisoners. Neither communists, nor socialists, nor republicans... none of them! Supposedly vanguard organizations advocating for the progression of secular society and the levelling of social classes have never made amends for the most repressed social class—who they said, and still say, that they represent. It's sad to hear the forlorn and silent cry of a group who by their homogenous characteristics (in some aspects) doesn't know how to justify their rightful rebellion to others because of ignorance, fear, and cowardice.

Anyway... I wanted to talk to you and embrace you, for you to know that what I feel and think is the fruit of a common idea, and to share a little of my desires and sorrows with you, my brother, and to face it all with the idea that we are not alone in this war against injustice.

*With love and freedom, yours,
Gabriel Pombo*

The letter from my friend made me think. It brought me joy that he had embraced anarchy as a human philosophy with which to confront the system. Anarchy, the culture of liberation, was in the long term the hope of society, especially the hope of the most oppressed.

I continued running around the small yard, stubbornly improving my physical condition. I ran for an hour a day, now that they had lengthened the yard time, and I worked on my flexibility. This inspired me and I decided to stop smoking. It had been a long time since I had left drugs behind me and the one vice that remained was tobacco. I was obsessed with quitting and it meant a lot to me, since it would improve my health, and leave me with more money to spend

on food, since tobacco was the main thing I spent money on. After these exercise sessions, always spied on by a guard who hid behind the bars of the sentry box next to the yard, I walked, handcuffed, to the showers where I washed and changed my clothes. They didn't allow us to have any clothes in the cells apart from what we wore and a towel, so they kept our belongings beside the showers so we could change there. Then they took the dirty clothes away to the laundry and collected them again in bags with our numbers on them.

July came, and with it came the heat and a visit from my mother and her husband. She was beautiful, but sad because of how they had me in here, as a mother always notices.

"Hello son," she greeted me.

"Hello, mother..."

"How are they treating you, darling?"

"Like they always do, you know."

"Yes. I've been calling on the telephone these last few months, but they always hung up on me," she told me. "I asked for the Director, who told me, very rudely, that you are incommunicado and that I can't talk to you."

"Don't call here any more, okay?" I said to her. "You can take it easy. I know how to take care of myself."

"I brought you some clothes and food, but they wouldn't let the food in..."

We continued talking for twenty minutes. It made me happy to see the two of them. I loved my mother a lot and I was happy she had met a companion who was good to her. She deserved it. After some kisses through the glass and some looks, in which the sparkle in her chestnut eyes, sad and wet, exchanged poetry with mine, they cuffed my hands behind my back and took me back to the unit and the cell. How could I explain all this to her? How could I tell her I was HIV positive? The mere idea of losing me would be unbearable to her. How could I express the pain that in moments like this made

me capable of doing something crazy? The system didn't content itself with keeping us smothered and suspended from life; it also had to cause pain to our families and punish them as they did with us: in a cruel, vengeful way.

Days after this visit, Moisés stuck a piece of steel in his chest, at lung height. We told the guards and it was fifteen minutes before they came back with the doctor to the wing. They opened the door of our companion's cell and handcuffed him. From the cells, through the corridor, we could hear everything.

"Don't make me come down here for this bullshit! If you've stuck yourself, you're fucked..." yelled the doctor.

After a series of threats, they finally extracted the steel and treated him. However, Moisés cut himself again when they left him alone in the cell, this time using a piece of a blade that he had hidden. They rushed back in and cuffed him to the bed after hitting him. Then the doctor ordered him to be given an injection, and before leaving, with Moisés insulting them, they pepper-sprayed his whole cell. Young and an AIDS carrier, Moisés Caamániz could not bear isolation in these conditions and was becoming desperate. It was his character. Weak and nervous, that silence, these white walls—that closed in on us a little more every day—were driving him crazy and pushing him to the limit to avoid pain through self-harm. It seemed contradictory, but it was like that: self-harm in these circumstances was a solution for him, a way of shouting *Enough!* to the isolation and the loneliness, to break the monotony and attract attention to himself, his problems, and his suffering. Several days later they took him to a less severe regime in the prison in Alicante.

It wasn't long after this that we heard of his hanging after being transferred to Villanubla in Valladolid. It was to be expected. Prison was one thing, but prison inside a prison was very different. With this young man, as with many others, they had been mistaken. Moisés was no more than a young addict who had committed a series of crimes under the influence of the drugs had flooded each and every

one of the prisons in the state of Spain, each and every one of the cities, and each and every one of the poor neighbourhoods, of which there were so many.

The Administration allowed us this month to have a TV, which helped to keep us entertained. We bought a small 5" one for each of us to break the monotony that drowned us. Like the immense majority of the prison population, we got engrossed in the programs on the different channels. We followed the second Tour de France, won ably by Miguel Indurain, which turned me into a fan of this sport. I also befriended a spider that hunted flies and mosquitoes in the cell. I took her down to the yard in a plastic bag. She set herself up in one of the corners and I nicknamed her *Doña Tecla* in honour of the wicked spider who was in the cartoon "Maya the Bee" from my longed-for childhood years. I would sit down next to her and her magnificent web, majestically woven, and place the insects on it. Then she would leave her hiding place and hurl herself at them, covering them in silk. Afterwards she took them back to her cave where, like in a pantry, she kept them after injecting their bodies with venom. Then she waited for their bodies to decompose so she could suck them up. After this, she got rid of the empty bodies by throwing them onto the ground from the web and went to await the arrival of new victims. It's not that spiders are my favourite animal, but at least she kept me company, and it distracted me to observe her. Sometimes I broke pieces of her web just so I could see how she built them again with her mastery. I also played with some dung beetles that gathered in the yard. We were friends. They didn't attack me and I didn't attack them; we lived in harmony in this concrete world. It was incredible what fauna there was there. One afternoon while talking through the windows we watched a harrier fly over the big yard that no one went onto, where several birds ate the food we threw to them. The pair of starlings, who by now had finished building their nest and were hatching their eggs, noticed its presence and flew to refuge in a small hole. Instead

the harrier caught a small sparrow, attacked him greedily, surprising him, capturing him, and taking away his lifeless body in his strong, powerful talons. It would probably serve as lunch for his hungry chicks. We also watched the copulation of a pair of seagulls on the wall, without any shyness, launching shouts of pleasure as they reached orgasm, to the accompanying laughter of us all.

August did nothing more than confirm that the regime would continue indefinitely. With the concessions—the yard hours in solitude and the introduction of personal clothing, as well as the (limited, censored) communication and access to the shop (even though the products were limited)—it looked like they had given us all the possible rights, including television.

José Antonio Moreta was promoted for his hard work in El Dueso, especially with us, and transferred to Carrabanchel, where only two years later he would be found guilty of embezzlement and dismissed from his post as Director. Was it with men like these that they expected to make us into respectable citizens? To replace him they brought in a well-known face, José Ignacio Bermúdez, from the jail at Orense. With this Director everything stayed the same: benefits for the almost five hundred rapists and for the drug traffickers. For those of us who had dared to rebel against the power: isolation, lockdowns, and beatings.

On 11 September, around midday, there was a riot with hostages taken in Daroca. We heard the news on the radio. Several companions—Joaquín Ángel Zamoro Durán, Luque Tamajón, José Romero González, Eduardo Camacho Chacón, Juan Manuel González Fernández, and Enrique Velasco—fed up with rotting in prison, took some hostages in units one and two. They negotiated for their escape, demanding a vehicle at the door and the way clear of police, under the threat that they would execute several guards. From the DGIP came Ángel Yuste Catillejo, Assistant Director of Penitentiary

Affairs, and from the JVP Luis Pérez Román, a sixty-five year old Francoist. They went into the prison to negotiate with the prisoners, who unbeknownst to them had cut through some bars that gave them access to the corridor from where they were negotiating, with the aim of kidnapping the negotiators. The administrators fell into the trap and both were taken hostage. Outside there was a huge commotion and the UEI (Special Intervention Units) formed up in the prison yard. The television showed images of Zamoro Durán and Luque Tamajón shouting from one of the windows in the unit, calling for better prison conditions to the media outside.

Some hours later it was reported that one of the guards was seriously wounded, having received a stab wound to the neck from José Romero González. From outside they promised to give the resisters a car and an escape route so they would not do anything else and so they would release the injured guard. The resisters let the guard go. It was a mistake. With the information they got from the guard the UEI went to work, posting their men on the roofs and preparing explosive charges. The assault started within minutes; explosions opened the necessary holes and the Special Units went inside the prison armed with handguns, sub-machine guns, bulletproof vests, helmets, and every type of war material, all to confront a group of prisoners armed with some blades. Joaquín Zamoro Durán was shot twice in the assault, once in the leg and once in the wrist. A prisoner who was walking around nearby, without participating in the hostage-taking, was shot in the stomach.

They were all captured in minutes and the hostages were rescued alive. The rest of the prisoners who had participated in the rebellion had their arms and legs broken with baseball bats and, stripped naked, were transferred to hospital. They were then dispersed to different prisons. José Romero González, alias *el Loco*, came to El Dueso, and they put him next to me. He was in terrible shape, destroyed by the beating they had given him and, with his immune system depleted, he was having an outbreak of psoriasis, an illness that rotted the skin,

leaving it full of open sores. They had gambled and lost. Curiously, of those who had participated in this kidnapping, the majority had AIDS.

We were all taken for more X-rays. The medical service was a total piece of shit. But they had gotten a new assistant who had arrived recently, called María del Mar, who treated us with great sympathy and friendship. Despite this, I was often serious and distant with her, but she made me understand that she didn't see me as an enemy. She often found me studying.

"You sure copy out a lot of stuff," she said to me, smiling.

"If you copy, why study then, right?" I showed her.

"I've brought the scales, do you want to weigh yourself?"

"Sure, let's see."

She was a good woman, but I could only see her through a gate. Eventually she would quit working there and protest against our mistreatment to the Prison Ombudsman, who—like all the others in charge of these institutions—would throw the case out. Over the years, she would become Juanjo's partner. Sometimes destiny was surprising and rebellious.

One of these mornings, tired of the provocations of one of the guards, I had words with him during the search.

"You wouldn't be so brave on the other side of the bars," I told him. "If you come onto the yard, alone, and have a scrap with me, faggot, you'll be leaving in tears."

"You're just a son of a bitch," he answered.

After breakfast, they came to take me to the yard. The guard I had words with a few minutes before came accompanied by two others and a Head Warden, who carried a baton. When I came to the gate and they asked for my clothing to search it, I sucked some phlegm into my mouth and spat it right in his face.

"That's from my mother," I told him, savouring the moment.

I had wanted to do that for a long time.

They went for the keys while threatening me. I prepared for

what might happen, inviting them in, standing beside the bed. When they opened the door, the first one in, hesitant, was the guard I had spat on, with whom I traded punches in a fair fight. But we hadn't swapped more than three blows when the Head Warden, seeing that I was defending myself, came into the cell with his club, got up on the bed, and started to hit me in the head. I tried to grab the baton to take it away from him, but a blow to the face knocked me back against the wall, where they knocked me down onto the ground. I was kicked in the face, breaking my nose, and the club didn't stop hitting my head, preventing me from reacting. After kicking me and clubbing me in the head, they dragged me to the gate. All this happened while the other guards watched, ready to jump in. They cuffed me to the bed with hands behind my back, semi-conscious, blood spouting from my nose and mouth. Then they came back to insult me and break the TV and window so that afterwards they could report to the Juzgado that I had tried to use them to assault the guards. After leaving the cell, one of the guards (known as *Caniche*), came back and tightened the cuffs on my wrists.

Hours later, a doctor came to see me and ordered me to have an injection. I refused so they had to give it to me by force, lying on the bed. They grabbed me by the arms and legs, pulling my hair to restrain me, and gave me the injection. After this brave act, they took me, still with my hands cuffed behind my back, to a Guardia Civil van that was used to take me to the Hospital Marqués de Valdecilla (from what I was able hear). Before getting in I saw, hidden, the Director. We exchanged looks. I didn't know his face, but I knew it was him. I hated him. They drove quickly, and in the hospital several plainclothes detectives surrounded me. With a more than considerable police escort, because of the danger represented, they reconstructed my nose while I was in terrible pain and afterwards they plastered up half of my face. When they took me back to El Dueso, the guards cuffed me to the gate again. A Head Warden came to talk to me. My bloody appearance and my plastered face moved

him apparently:

"Fuck, Tarrío, you don't learn, huh?"

"Learn what?" I asked, looking at him with rage.

"Don't you see that if you take them all on you lose, man? Write, read, paint, but don't start provoking people—you see what happens. Even if there's no other reason, Tarrío," he insisted. "And don't think that I like seeing you here like this and going home with this image in my head."

"Yeah..." I said sarcastically.

"Well, can I let you out of the cuffs?"

"Up to you."

"If you aren't going to break anything or attack anyone I'll let you go, okay?"

"Okay."

He opened the cuffs and left. My companions called me.

"Hey José," shouted Carlos.

"Talk to me."

"Where were you? We've been calling you..."

"In the hospital."

"Why?" asked Juanjo.

"They bandaged my nose because they broke it."

"They hit me too, coming back from the yard, and Juanjo as well," explained Juan. "See, I told them they were cowards and when they brought me to the yard handcuffed from behind, and then they hit me. They put Carlos in the hole."

"It's nothing, relax."

They had moved Barrot to Villanubla several days before. I had been in bed for a week without going onto the yard. That morning I went to run a bit. I was running on the yard when, through a window of the guards' office, I spotted the warden who I had had the scrap with, the coward with the club.

"You're hard to beat, huh?" he shouted at me.

I looked at him with disgust and continued running indifferently, but he kept going, with a smile on his lips”

“You know your companion died this morning?”

I stopped for a moment:

“Which companion?”

“Barrot. He hanged himself in Valladolid.”

I continued running, thinking about this and ignoring the presence of this pig. I didn’t feel anything for Barrot since he wasn’t exactly someone I got on well with; but I felt angry for what had happened, for the constant encouragement to commit suicide that was constructed day-by-day by those calling themselves State employees, who were nothing more than torturers and executioners.

Once in the cell, I passed the news on to the rest of the companions. Then I fell into bed. I felt very uncomfortable with the plaster on my face, so I took it off and threw it in the corner of the cell. I lit a cigarette. It was the last one I would smoke. I enjoyed its flavour while looking at the smoke.

Have you ever felt like an injured animal while vultures circled in the sky overhead? Although the construction of literature was not my forte, I would have to tell this story some day, to explain these feelings that turned us all into victims and executioners of the monstrous prison machine.

When I decided to write *Huye, hombre, huye*, I simply wanted to make known a reality of the prison world from the point of view of the profound knowledge that I have from direct experience. I wanted my narration to be accurate, drawing close to the truth (since I don't need to presume to know it) so that each one of you can draw your own conclusions according to your ideology and humanity. When I wrote the pages you have read, that make up *Huye, hombre, huye*, all my friends and companions, the men who, in prison and on the run, made up my family, passed through my mind. Most of them have since died of AIDS. Every phrase, every word, every thought constituted an homage to their memory, tears that my eyes, not in the habit of crying, only now spilled out in the form of words. That is why I only ask one thing of the readers of this book, be they fans or critics, is that they should understand that to write this a lot of suffering, pain, and death were necessary. This is why I firmly believe that it deserves respect and attention, but above all, and as its main objective, a profound reflection. All the people in prison have already been judged in one way or another, so we don't need another trial for these men and women, but for you: is this system desirable or should it be changed and something better tried instead? You choose: you can keep on this path or stop and think. You are responsible for all that you choose to pay for and sustain with your taxes, and it is up to you to decide what things are done with them.

Huye, hombre, huye is not an exceptional story, it is just a sad story repeated again and again in the Spanish prisons. It is also the humble attempt of an amateur to convey a raw reality, put on paper with the limitations of a grade school education. Considering that this is my first attempt the most I can offer is my sincerity. For the rest I won't try to adorn with literary frills a subject so serious. I have tried to be simple, raw, hard, and critical as the subject requires, without

falling into victimhood, but also without avoiding the stories of palpable deeds that the media have silenced, and I will assume the risks and consequences that will come from their exposure since I write from a cell where I am at the mercy of the people I openly criticise in this book. What's more, I believe I need to write a second book to pose questions that have since come to my writing desk, about things like the death of José Romero González from AIDS in the prison of Picassent (Valencia)—apparently normal but for the final days of his life spent in agony in a prison hospital chained to a bed. (The guards enacted, with the collusion of the judge Alberola Carbonell, a particular revenge for the kidnapping at Daroca.) There is also the death of Juan Luis Sánchez González after several beatings from the guards at Jaén 2, where he hung himself on November 29, 1995. He was my neighbour at the time, and I had to listen, day after day, to the blows and shouts of pain; until one day he was taken away dead. He was twenty-two years old. He had dared to assault a guard and paid for it with his life. There is also the death of José Luis Iglesias Amaro (alias *Mastinato*), hung, after many beatings, in prison in Picassent on 27 February, 1994, as well as that of Juan Luis López Montero in September 1993 in Almería, or that of Moisés Caamániz in Villanubla, Valladolid, hung in June 1994 (the guards found him in time but, afraid that it was a hoax, they left him to die hanging from a piece of a bed sheet). Also that of Isabel Soria Camino due to medical neglect in 1994 in Villanubla, and so many other deaths in prison due to negligence and persuasion to suicide from the penal institution. It shouldn't be forgotten that four of these prisoners were in an illegal special regime—FIES, not provided for in any currently effective law—nor that about one hundred prisoners suffer this brutal regime in the prisons of Badajoz, Jaén, Villanubla, Valdemoro, Picassent, Sotoreal, and Villabona, places that completely violate their most basic human rights.

To write this book took me about two years (due to the complications of having to get it out little by little, hidden with

lawyers), and in all this time I have honestly seen enough to write another book. I didn't want to include it all here because it would be too long and repetitive. It is true that throughout this book I only talk about prisoners in closed regimes and this was done for two reasons. In the first place because closed regimes and FIES are the only ones I have known in prison, and secondly because these isolated people are, along with the terminally ill in prison, the most in need of having their circumstances known. Of course my companion prisoners are not perfect people and without a doubt the majority are violent, but... why are they like that? Clues to the answers are in this book. I am not going to deny the brutality that exists between prisoners, unfortunately, and so I have related disturbing passages about this, trying to remain faithful to reality without adding or omitting anything.

After many years of isolation one learns much about men, and it is true that many of these things are no more than the result of our own brutality, nonetheless the commitment, the bravery, and the incredible solidarity that many of these people keep in their hearts is unquestionable. The attitude of a few can't confuse that. I know men and women in prison with a dignity so great that one can't help but be impressed, prisoners with a conscience so clean that you could only hope for as much for yourselves, as would I. The majority of the messages of this book are taken from them, from their letters and smiles, from their riots and rebellions, from their tremendous humanity that I have carried—at the best of times—in myself.

I didn't want to make it public out of respect for their privacy but the large majority of the people in this book are AIDS carriers and are waiting for death. In all respects they have more than enough dignity and solidarity for the rest of us. Also I have to say that I may have mistaken some dates and that some of the conversations that appear in this story are not exact reproductions of the originals, since, how can I recollect intact conversations after so many years? Despite this, the subjects are the same, the same tone used, that of

my own character.

As for myself I have little to say. I have used the narrative of events that happened in prison to mark the trajectory of the PSOE and the Spanish state, events I have seen, heard, at times made happen. I have taken the opportunity to say clearly what I think about a rotten, inhumane system, completely lacking intelligence, which I abhor with all my heart.

I only hope now to contribute with this book to build something better. I have always believed in free, independent human beings, not ones kept in institutions. I hope that these words are of some help and can at least keep hope alive, contributing to some utopia (such as the transformation of prisons into schools, for example), or the avoidance of injustice against some man or woman—in whatever place in the world—in the immediate future. I hope that they serve to stop some neighbourhood kid from coming to occupy the cell that's left empty when the prison spits out my corpse, and for whom they are already forging new chains. If I achieve this I will be satisfied and happy. But while the future is full of events that are still to see the light, my pen whispers between the cold walls of this concrete tomb, built on your cold consciences. Whispers that can make hairs stand on end and that make me cold as well, a human and moral coldness... I don't believe they will kill my feelings or opinions, or extinguish my shouts, the child I still am, or the freedom that still beats inside me. I won't let them chain up my values with lies: they constitute my existence, my nourishment. I am not a whimp; I am a war cry from the unending night of prison darkness.

Xosé Tarrío González
Topas Prison, Salamanca
18 March, 1996

Acknowledgements

For the *Asociación de Madres contra la Droga*, for Ms. Manoli Navas (who was so good with us), for *Sallhaketa* (who fights for the rights of prisoners), for CASCO, the Platform, and all organizations that support AIDS carries in prisons, to Javier Ávila Navas and Carlos Esteve García (who helped me to type many of these pages); for Santiago Izquierdo Trancho, Carlos García Lago, and his brother Óscar; for Juan José Garfia Rodríguez (who corrected the first draft and helped to improve it); for Joaquín Zamoro Durán (that he may be free and happy); for Edmundo Balsa Franco; for Patric de San Pedro (who, more than an editor, was a true companion who knew how to see the truth of prison and to give us a voice) and the other companions of Virus; for Gloria, Marian, Sefa, Carmele, and Usune (who filled punishment cells with their smiles); for Juan Manuel González Fernández (who offered help when I needed it—I hope you are free soon, my friend!); for María del Mar Villar (who treated us humanely); for the woman who gave me the gift of true love and the joy of experiencing it, Ms. Alexandra de Queirós Vaz Pinheiro; for all who in some way helped me in prison; for the ones who are not here any more; for those who sit in front of a typewriter to bring forth a new book that tells everything that I, due to ignorance, didn't know... and, above all, for all those who fight in prison and whose names are unknown, but whose struggle has brought us so many benefits. For Toni, a young man of twenty-one who reminded me of this in the sixteenth day of the March strike...

A libertarian embrace for all

For Xosé in Memoriam

Xosé Tarrío died on January 2, 2005... Though he was dead the authorities did not wish to hand over Xosé's body to his family, who had to make official complaints to get his body back...

Not only his health, freedom, and life; Xosé apparently also owed his death and body to the State... They never forgave him for writing *Huye, hombre, huye* because in that book he put names and dates/places to the tortures and torturers. He gave faces and names to rebels and revolts... He gave voice to the nothing-acts and the nobodies... He describes with minute precision the functioning of the Prison Monster... A testimony replete with feelings, emotions, thoughts, and events that he had the patience and courage to assemble and publish... A book that has served to open the eyes of many and take away the blindfold of others... A book that shows what is really behind the symbol of Justice as a woman with scales and a blindfold... she is actually a prostitute who does it for money, without scruples, with whomever she wants, because she feels like it... A contemporary *J'Accuse...!*; a *We Accuse*, a *We Say*, *We Speak*. We tell everything that is hidden away, silenced, distorted, denied...

Yes, Xosé!... the pimps of that Lady with a scale, blindfold, and sword have not forgiven you for saying that in reality she is an exploited prostitute who does it for money or power!... We all know that that "lady" serves the interests of the powerful, dirty and criminal though they might be, or precisely because of that...

Justice! Crazy stuff, Xosé, huh?

(...)

When, after so many years, you emerged in "freedom", you maybe thought that those who knew what you knew and thought like you, would act as you did, according to their beliefs... But the I, the you, the we and plural you are much more complicated to

conjugate and coordinate in practice than in theory, in the individual than in the collective. It is an equation of Time/Circumstances...

They say that the one who hopes is one who becomes desperate... and you emerged full of hope and despair, dreams, nightmares, projects, illusions, and disillusiones... At last the "balloon" popped in your hands, and with it hopes, dreams, projects, and illusions... and you locked yourself up in yourself: alone with your solitudes, memories, and despairs... Despairing and alone... we all left you alone, Xosé...

What has not been lived and felt cannot be shared... what is individual cannot be socialized, just as what cannot be lived or seen for oneself cannot be taught.

Gossiping tongues told me that you took refuge in alcohol and drugs... Others take refuge in cowardice and fear, conformism and words, so ultimately who can criticize your refuge?

I know what happened to you, but above all why and because of whom... it's called loneliness, fear, isolation, doubts... A flight towards the inside, towards the depth, forward... A "collateral" effect of prison, tortures, and powerlessness...

But we are all fugitives, Xosé, though the majority don't know it—or don't know from what or why they are fleeing... Fugitives from freedom, from life, from commitment...

Paradoxically we who have been in prison, with our steps, with our soul/hearts, manage to flee our time, the latest and most free in the plan of Ideas, Passions, and Desires... precisely so as not to feel/live the walls, prisoners and jailers we are born into a new world...

No one had told us that behind the walls there are more walls, more prisoners, and more watchmen...

No one pointed out to us that after all freedom was not on one side or the other of the wall but inside us, in us... Just as no one could convince us that flight is multiple and permanent; that it's not enough to jump over a wall because there is another, and another, and another...

Yes, Xosé, it was not about jumping over walls, but knocking them down... it was not about fleeing (in any of its forms) but about struggling and sharing the pain and the joy...

But every process takes its time; its effort, its tears and smiles, stagnation and advances...

Thank you, Xosé, for having taught us what Justice and Prisons are... for having taken away the blindfold of some and opening up the eyes of others...

Thank you for having been my friend and for everything I will never be able to tell you with words... which is why I will keep on showing you with deeds.

Death to the State! Long Live Anarchy!

Gabriel Pombo da Silva
Aachen Prison
20 February 2005